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Waterston House, Aberlady,
East Lothian EH32 0PY.

Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk
Phone: 01875 871330
www.the-soc.org.uk

www.facebook.com/ScotlandsBirdClub
twitter.com/ScottishBirding

Editors:

Co-ordinating editor
Ian Andrews

Peer-reviewed papers
Dr Stan da Prato
Assisted by:
Dr I. Bainbridge
Dr M. Marquiss
Dr C.R. McKay
Dr W.T.S. Miles
R. Swann

Articles, news and views
Jimmy Maxwell
Dr Stuart L. Rivers
Harry Scott

Editorial correspondence:
c/o SOC, Waterston House,
Aberlady, East Lothian EH32 0PY.
Email: mail@the-soc.org.uk

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Scottish Birds is the quarterly journal for SOC members, and is published in March, June, September and December annually.

Containing original papers relating to ornithology in Scotland, topical articles, bird observations, reports of rare and scarce bird sightings, alongside branch and Club-related news, our members tell us that *Scottish Birds* is one of the key benefits of belonging to the SOC. Its different sections have been developed to meet the wide needs of the birdwatching community, and the publication is renowned for its first-class photography.

An archive of the journal is available on the SOC website, where links can be found to other Club publications including the *Scottish Bird Report* online.

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On the one hand, a birdwatching club. Established in 1936, the Scottish Ornithologists' Club (SOC) is Scotland's bird club with 15 branches around the country and a growing membership of over 3,000. Through a programme of talks, outings, conferences and other events, it brings together like-minded individuals with a passion for birds, nature and conservation.

On the other, a network of volunteers across Scotland, gathering vital, impartial information about our wild birds. The data we collect is made available to conservationists, planners and developers, and is used by organisations such as the RSPB, as one of the first points of reference in informed conservation planning.

Club Headquarters can be found at Waterston House, Aberlady, overlooking the scenic local nature reserve. Housed within, is the George Waterston Library, the largest ornithological library in Scotland, and the Donald Watson Gallery - one of the jewels in the Waterston House crown, exhibiting wildlife art all year-round.

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As well as receiving *Scottish Birds* every quarter, SOC members have access to a programme of talks and outings across Scotland and affiliation to a local branch of the Club. New members will receive a welcome pack on joining, plus a thank you gift if paying their subscription by direct debit.

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Plate 1. Ian Bainbridge looking for Willow Tits, Dumfries & Galloway, January 2019. © *Carole Bainbridge*

The value of volunteering

Volunteering is a wonderful thing. Studies have shown that it is worth millions of pounds to the environmental sector in the UK, calculated at the Office of National Statistics rate of almost £15 per hour. From my perspective, however, it makes me feel better! It gets Carole and me out birding together - to do our WeBS counts on the Fleet Estuary, for example. Who wouldn't feel better to be counting 800 Common Scoters and 115 Scaup on the outer estuary on a calm winter's day in January, easy to count on a millpond sea, accompanied by over 20 Red-throated Divers. It's brilliant to watch several hundred Dunlin twinkling in the winter sun as they join ten Greenshanks (yes, ten!) at their roost on the rocks with the Oystercatchers and Curlews. It blows away the cobwebs, and makes you realise you are contributing to our knowledge of Scotland's birds, and as the sea duck records seem to be new data, there's always an extra wee pleasure in recording these birds.

There are plenty of other opportunities for volunteering as a birdwatcher. The BTO Tawny Owl survey is on this winter; you can do that from home, or even in bed with the window open! The RSPB is organising a Willow Tit survey (and yes, we do still have some in Galloway, although unfortunately I expect our selected squares to give zero counts). Every time you record a bird on Birdtrack, you are volunteering as well, and it's more than useful to record our roving flock of 700 Chaffinches, with a few Bramblings and even a Tree Sparrow the other day (and they are rare here!).

Plenty of folk volunteer on nature reserves, doing physical management tasks, or running a nestbox scheme, again providing fantastic data on Pied Flycatchers and other woodland hole nesters.

I know that many Club members volunteer in other ways as well, helping with the local groups, organising field trips, or helping at Waterston House, whether it be providing a warm welcome to the centre or maintaining the wonderful garden. All are putting something back into an organisation we all value. Other folk volunteer to be group Chairs, sit on SOC Council or be officers of the Club. All of this helps to keep the show on the road, with folk exercising their own special skills to help.

Over the last few years, one of these folk has been Dave Heeley, who has been a rock as SOC Honorary Secretary. Dave's expertise with meetings management, constitutional matters and organisational knowledge has helped the Club keep abreast of the legal changes affecting charities, stay relevant to today and update the way we work. Dave will have served his term at the 2019 AGM, so we need to look for a new Secretary to continue the good work. If you think you might be interested in volunteering in this special way, look at the 'advert' in this issue, and talk to Wendy or one of the office bearers about the role. If you think you might know someone else who would be suitable, please have a word with them as well. The role of Honorary Secretary is vital to the Club and there must be someone out there who can pick up the baton.

In the meantime, enjoy your spring birding. When you read this, the Oystercatchers will be inland and the first Ospreys will be arriving - and I might be out surveying no Willow Tits but having a great time doing it.

Ian Bainbridge, SOC President.

Plate 2. Breeding Black Redstart habitat, Northern Corries, Cairngorms, Badenoch & Strathspey, July 2018. © *Peter Cosgrove*

Black Redstart breeding in the Cairngorms

P. COSGROVE

On 26 July 2018, I was hill walking in the Northern Corries of the Cairngorms in Badenoch & Strathspey. At 06:30 hrs, I saw a small, dull grey bird with a bright orange-red tail fly past me. It was carrying leggy invertebrate food in its beak (probably crane flies *Tipulidae*) and disappeared into a nearby boulder field. As I slowly made my way into the edge of the boulder field, up popped a female Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* without food. It scolded me, flew to within 5 m and began calling, a repetitive 'chack/tchack', and flicking its tail at me from a nearby boulder. The Black Redstart was very active and moved around the boulders clearly trying to distract me. It was calling almost constantly and agitated by my presence. As the bird was close, I could easily see the matching uniform dark grey upperparts and underparts. There was no hint of orange or buff on the breast or flanks and I could quickly eliminate an out-of-place female or juvenile Redstart *Phoenicurus phoenicurus*.

Keen not to disturb the bird, I quickly moved on, noting the grid reference and altitude (700 m a.s.l.). I did not have a camera with me, only my mobile phone, on which photographs of the breeding habitat were taken (Plates 2–3). The total duration of my observations was c. 5 mins.

Habitat

Given its behaviour, I am sure that the Black Redstart was breeding within the boulder field. The bird was in montane heath habitat (Plate 2) which is reminiscent of upland breeding habitats in the Italian, Spanish and Armenian mountains where I have seen the species previously.

The last time I saw the female on 26 July 2018, it was sitting in a very small, two-foot-tall Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris* (centre of Plate 3) in amongst Heather *Calluna vulgaris*. Montane scrub has very slowly started to recover from decades of over grazing in the area and it would be interesting to see if further recovery of this habitat would allow Black Redstarts to become a regular breeding bird in the Cairngorms or whether the birds prefer open habitats above the tree/scrub line.

Table 1. Spring-summer Black Redstart records, Badenoch & Strathspey, 1947–2018.

Date	Location and details	Reference
18 July 1989	Cairngorm, est. >900 m a.s.l.	Dennis (1995)
3 August 1990	Coire an Lochain cliffs, female, est. 930 m a.s.l.	Dennis (1995)
18 May 1992	Braes of Castle Grant, singing male	Dennis (1995)
30 May 1995	Rynettin, Abernethy Forest, est. 400 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
31 July 1995	Beinn a 'Bhuird Garbh Choire, immature/female at 1,060 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
19 May 1996	Glenmarkie, Laggan, male, est. >280 m a.s.l.	Peter Stronach pers. comm.
2006	Cairngorms. No further details.	Cairngorm Mountain Ranger Service /Ruari Macdonald pers. comm.
8 April 2008	Ruthven Barracks, female. est. 230 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
2010	Five Cairngorms records. No further details. May refer to same as June record (below).	Cairngorm Mountain Ranger Service /Ruari Macdonald pers. comm.
5–25 June 2010	Cairngorm mountain car park, singing first-summer male, est. 630 m a.s.l.	Ian Francis pers. comm. & BirdGuides
21 March 2011	Lochan Mor, Aviemore, est. 230 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
26 April 2012	Loch Insh, male, est. 240 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
4 May 2012	Dulnain Bridge, male est. 210 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
11 July 2012	Aviemore, adult female, est. 230 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
18 June 2013	Aviemore, est. 230 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
27 March 2014	Aviemore, est. 230 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
14 April 2016	Coire na Ciste, Cairngorm, est. >600 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
5 May 2016	Maol a' Ghiubhais, Newtonmore, singing male, est. 400 m a.s.l.	Highland Bird Report
22–25 March 2018	Nethy Bridge, River Spey, singing male at 200 m a.s.l.	Pers. obs. (Plate 3)
2018	Coire an Sneachda.	Cairngorm Mountain Ranger Service /Ruari Macdonald pers. comm.
26 July 2018	Northern Corries, Cairngorms, adult female carrying food and distracting observer, 700 m a.s.l.	Pers. obs.

Plate 3. Breeding Black Redstart habitat, Northern Corries, Cairngorms, Badenoch & Strathspey. July 2018. © *Peter Cosgrove*. Note the tentative signs of montane scrub recovery within the heath.

Plate 4. Male Black Redstart, Nethy Bridge, Badenoch & Strathspey, 25 March 2018. © *Peter Cosgrove*

Other records in the Cairngorms area

In Highland, the species is considered to be a scarce migrant and winter visitor (e.g. Highland Bird Report, 2002–15). Historically, Black Redstart was considered to be a vagrant in Badenoch and Strathspey by Dennis (1995), who listed just five records since the first one in 1947. Three of these records were of birds during the breeding season, two of which were in suitable montane breeding habitats (Table 1). Since then, there has been a steady increase in Black Redstart breeding season records of both males (some singing) and females across Badenoch and Strathspey, particularly during the last decade. Where a specific altitude was recorded, this is included in Table 1 in metres above sea level (a.s.l.). Where no specific altitude was recorded, an estimated altitude is provided where possible based on the reported location and the Ordnance Survey 1:50 000 map.

In comparison, there appear to be no published Black Redstarts records in the eastern Cairngorms over the equivalent period. The *North-East Scotland Bird Reports* and the *Birds in Moray and Nairn* list none, although there was an earlier record of a female/immature on Ben Rinnes, north of the Cairngorms in Moray & Nairn in April 1984 (Cook 1992).

Discussions with local ecologists and ornithologists working in North-east Scotland have revealed three recent and intriguing Black Redstart records from the eastern Cairngorms:

- A dull, unsexed bird (not singing) seen at Lochnagar on 10 June 2013 foraging on the edge of a snow field below a steep rocky area at 960 m a.s.l. on a north facing slope. The site was rechecked later on in the season and every year since but without success (Mick Marquiss pers. comm.).
- A juvenile was present around the Mar Lodge stable blocks from 27 August to 6 September 2016 (Andrew Painting pers. comm.).
- A female seen around the Mar Lodge stable blocks on 5 April 2018 (Andrew Painting pers. comm.).

Discussion

According to the Highland Bird Recorder, the 2018 Northern Corries sighting constitutes the first confirmed breeding record for Highland (Peter Stronach pers. comm.). To date, there have been only a very small number of confirmed Black Redstart breeding records in Scotland, but several others were strongly suspected. The published breeding records were Orkney, 1973 (Forrester & Andrews, 2007); Aberdeen, 1976 (Francis & Cook 2011); Isle of May, 1997 (Forrester & Andrews, 2007) and Borders, 2013 (Holling *et al.* 2015).

There are also a number of records of apparently recently fledged young appearing in late summer when there has been no previous evidence of them being in the area, suggesting breeding locally, e.g. Musselburgh, Lothian (1996), Borve, Outer Hebrides (2010), Lothian (2013) and Ayrshire (2015) (per RBBP).

The annual UK population of Black Redstart fluctuates markedly, with the latest population estimated at 18–58 pairs for 2016 (Holling *et al.* 2018). The Black Redstarts that breed in the UK have adapted to breeding in cities, quarries and lowland industrial sites. One wonders whether the upsurge in Badenoch & Strathspey records refers to birds from European mountainous habitats rather than an overspill from UK urban sites?

Although there have to date been few authenticated records of confirmed breeding by Black Redstarts in Scotland, we now have this record from the Cairngorms in 2018 and there are a few recent records of both adult and juvenile Black Redstarts at various locations in Scotland during the summer. The breeding habitat for the Borders 2013 record was upland scree. I suggest that there is a small breeding population in the Scottish uplands. Breeding has occurred in this decade at similar upland rocky sites in Wales with some sites being occupied for several years in a row. Birders in Scotland should be alert to the possibility of breeding Black Redstarts not only in 'traditional' urban sites but also in rural locations.

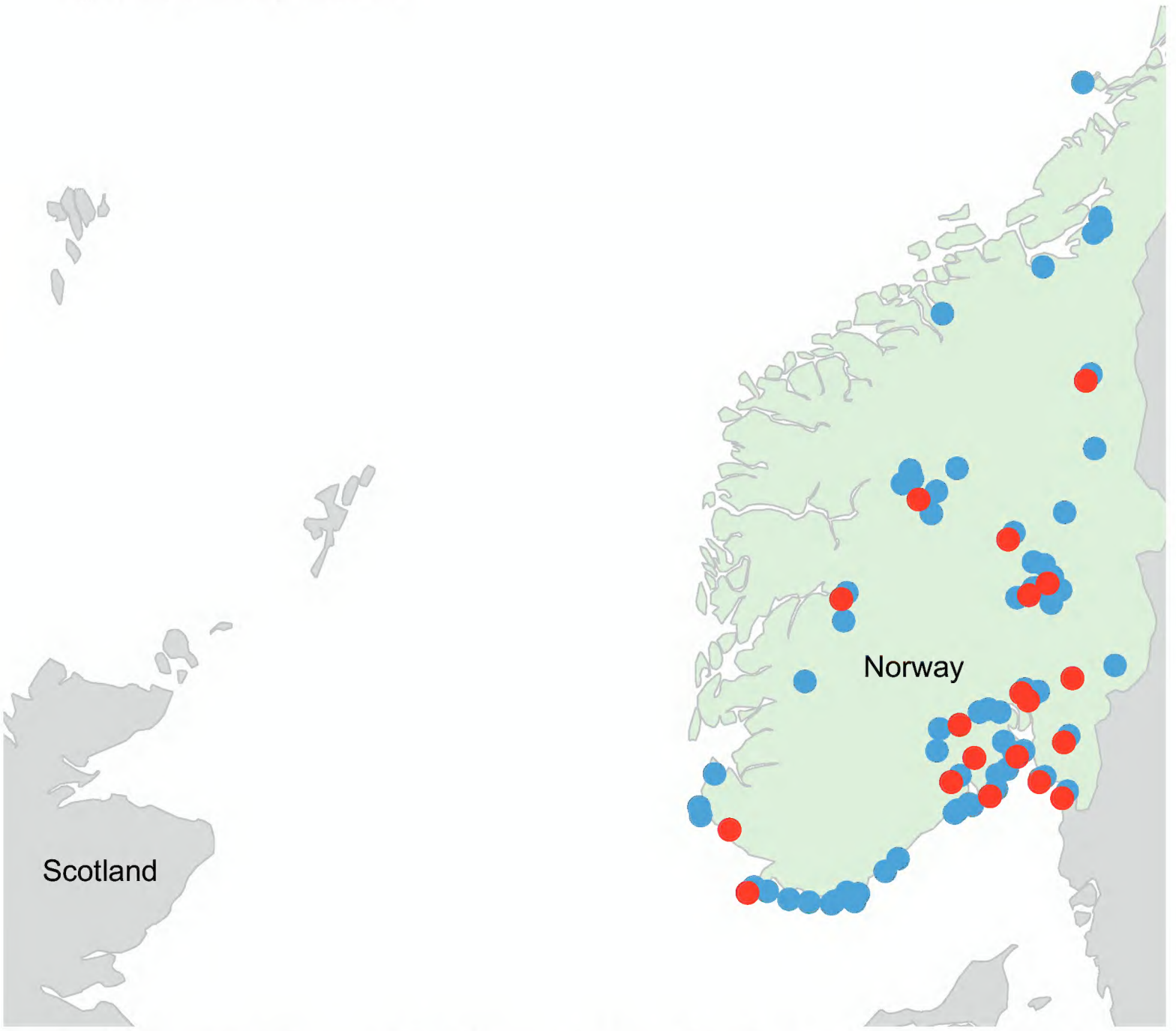

Figure 1. Proven (red) and suspected (blue) breeding records of Black Redstart in Norway (redrawn using data from NBICGBIF 2018).

Black Redstarts breed on similar soil types, latitudes and altitudes in Norway, with birds breeding for example in mountains up to 1,200 m a.s.l. Figure 1 illustrates the proven and possible breeding records of Black Redstart from Norway (NBICGBIF 2018). The Norwegian records system quoted here is based on reporting by individual birdwatchers, not a systematic monitoring effort. There are strong biases in favour of records in or near towns and cities away from remote mountain areas. The climate where many of the Black Redstarts breed in Norway is drier than in many parts of Scotland because of the mass of the mountains to the west. However, some breeding locations are oceanic, with rainfall and temperatures like Scotland's at similar elevations in summer (Duncan Halley pers. comm.).

The recent increase in spring/summer Cairngorms Black Redstart records hints at a handful of summering birds/breeding pairs. Most, but not all of these records are from relatively well-watched areas within Badenoch and Strathspey. Perhaps breeding Black Redstarts are being overlooked in Scotland. A co-ordinated search during the breeding season and a rapid follow-up of any Black Redstarts reported in potentially suitable upland breeding habitats across Scotland might help answer this.

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Peter Cosgrove, Alba Ecology Ltd., Coilintra House, High Street, Grantown on Spey, Moray, PH26 3EN.
E-mail: petercosgrove@albaecology.co.uk

Revised ms accepted October 2018

Plate 5. White-tailed Eagles '09TurquoiseZ' (front) and '09Turquoise1' (back) during release from the aviary. August 2009. © *Dan Spinks*

Polygyny in White-tailed Eagle: a case study from a reintroduced population

O.W. SELLY

Introduction

Following the reintroduction of White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* to East Scotland between 2007 and 2012, the species has been successfully breeding since 2013. Here, we look at a case study of atypical behaviour recorded by RSPB Scotland staff and volunteers at two sites in eastern Scotland during the 2017 breeding season. A single male from the 2009 release cohort was observed as the breeding male at two different nest sites separated by a distance of 46.5 km. The male is identified as '09TurquoiseZ' (release cohort year 2009 - vinyl wing tag colour - wing tag marking). '09TurquoiseZ' was observed in the full range of breeding behaviour at both nests, including territorial display, incubation, brooding, food provisioning and chick feeding. This male has been breeding successfully with the same female at Territory 91 in Fife since 2013 and this year also bred with female '11RedZ' at Territory 92 in Angus.

Plate 6. White-tailed Eagle '17BlueX', November 2017. © *Dennis Gentles*

Study area and methods

Territory 91[1], Fife

T91 in Fife is typified by mixed conifer plantation, lowland heath, arable farmland, estuarine and coastal habitats. The pair here, identified as '09Turquoise1' (female) and '09TurquoiseZ' (male), have bred successfully in this area of forestry since 2013. The unrelated pair occupied the same aviary for 14 weeks prior to release in 2009 (Plate 5) and appear to have pair bonded from an early age. They have built a new nest each year in mature Scots Pine *Pinus sylvestris*, Sitka Spruce *Picea sitchensis* and Lodgepole Pine *Pinus contorta*.

Since the second breeding attempt in 2014, monitoring at T91 in Fife has been undertaken by volunteers as a nest watch programme, initiated to protect the nest from disturbance. In 2017, 19 volunteers participated taking four-hour shifts in a camouflaged tent hide 430 m from the nest. Coverage is concentrated on the incubation and small chick stage when they are most vulnerable and finishes after fledging in August.

Observers in Fife covered the nest for 42% of daylight hours during the breeding season, from the beginning of incubation in April to fledging in August. There were peaks in coverage around hatching and close to fledging.

Territory 92, Angus

T92 in Angus is typified by mixed conifer plantation, upland heather moorland, upland grassland and sheep farming. The site has a complex history with neither of the adults responsible for building the original nest at this site now involved. The current pair, '11RedZ' (female, released in 2011) and '09TurquoiseZ' (male, released in 2009), have used the same nest, built in 2014 in a Sitka Spruce on the edge of a mixed conifer plantation at 400 m above sea level.

T92 in Angus is monitored by a small team of licenced volunteers from the Tayside Raptor Study Group alongside the project officer. It wasn't possible to provide the same level of cover at T92 due to the remote location and issues negotiating access.

[1] *Territory numbers are assigned Scotland-wide by RSPB.*

Diet

A full prey remains study was carried out at both nest sites during October. Prey remains were collected from the nests and surrounding area and identified to species where possible. The most numerous bone type for each species was used to count the number of individuals.

Results

Territory 91, Fife

The nest was built unusually late with construction not starting until early March. Established White-tailed Eagle pairs usually begin nest building in December (Hardy *et al.* 2013.) Nest visits by '09TurquoiseZ' were recorded at a frequency of 1 to 4 days (mean of 2.4 days). Incubation began on 9 April and hatching occurred on 17 May. Two chicks were observed until 19 June when one of the chicks was observed to have died on the nest at 33 days old. The remaining chick was wing tagged 'BlueX' (Plate 6) and satellite tagged on 12 July 2017 at 8 weeks old, it weighed 6 kg and biometrics suggest it is a female. It fledged on 9 August.

Territory 92, Angus

In Angus, '09TurquoiseZ' was recorded at the nest on seven occasions out of 31 observer visits during the period of incubation to fledging. On two occasions during the small chick stage, '09TurquoiseZ' was recorded at both sites on the same day, leaving Fife and arriving at the Angus nest 58 and 87 minutes later respectively. Incubation began on 2 April and hatching occurred on 10 May. Two chicks were recorded initially, however only one was seen after the first week. The remaining chick was wing tagged 'BlueV' (Plate 7) and satellite tagged on 5 July. It weighed 5.5 kg and biometrics suggest it is female. It fledged on 5 August.

Diet

The results of the prey remains study are shown in Figure 1.

Plate 7. White-tailed Eagle '17BlueV' after tagging, July 2017. © *Owen Selly*

Discussion

Polygyny involving multiple nest sites has not been noted in other European populations of White-tailed Eagle (personal communications with delegates at the International White-tailed Sea Eagle Conference in October 2017 including Björn Helander, Torgeir Nygård, Alv Ottar Folkestad & Pertti Saurola). In western Scotland, it has been recorded on two occasions between 1995 and 1997 with a maximum distance of 8 km between nest sites. Neither of these breeding attempts were successful in fledging chicks at both nests (source: White-tailed Eagle annual monitoring database, 1985–2017, RSPB Scotland). This record shows that polygyny can be a viable reproductive strategy for White-tailed Eagle, but what factors promoted it in this instance is less clear. It seems likely that a lack of breeding-age eagles in the area was the key factor, as a competing male in Angus would have been difficult for '09TurquoiseZ' to defend against. Polygyny has been recorded in nine of 36 European raptor species (not including White-tailed Eagle, the largest being Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*), which were associated with high food abundance and a nomadic breeding dispersal (Korpimäki 1988). This suggests that abundance of available prey at T92, particularly Mountain Hare *Lepus timidus* and Red Grouse *Lagopus lagopus scotica* (Figure 1), may also have been an important factor. The results of the prey remains study also suggest that the male did not carry food between the two sites with any frequency.

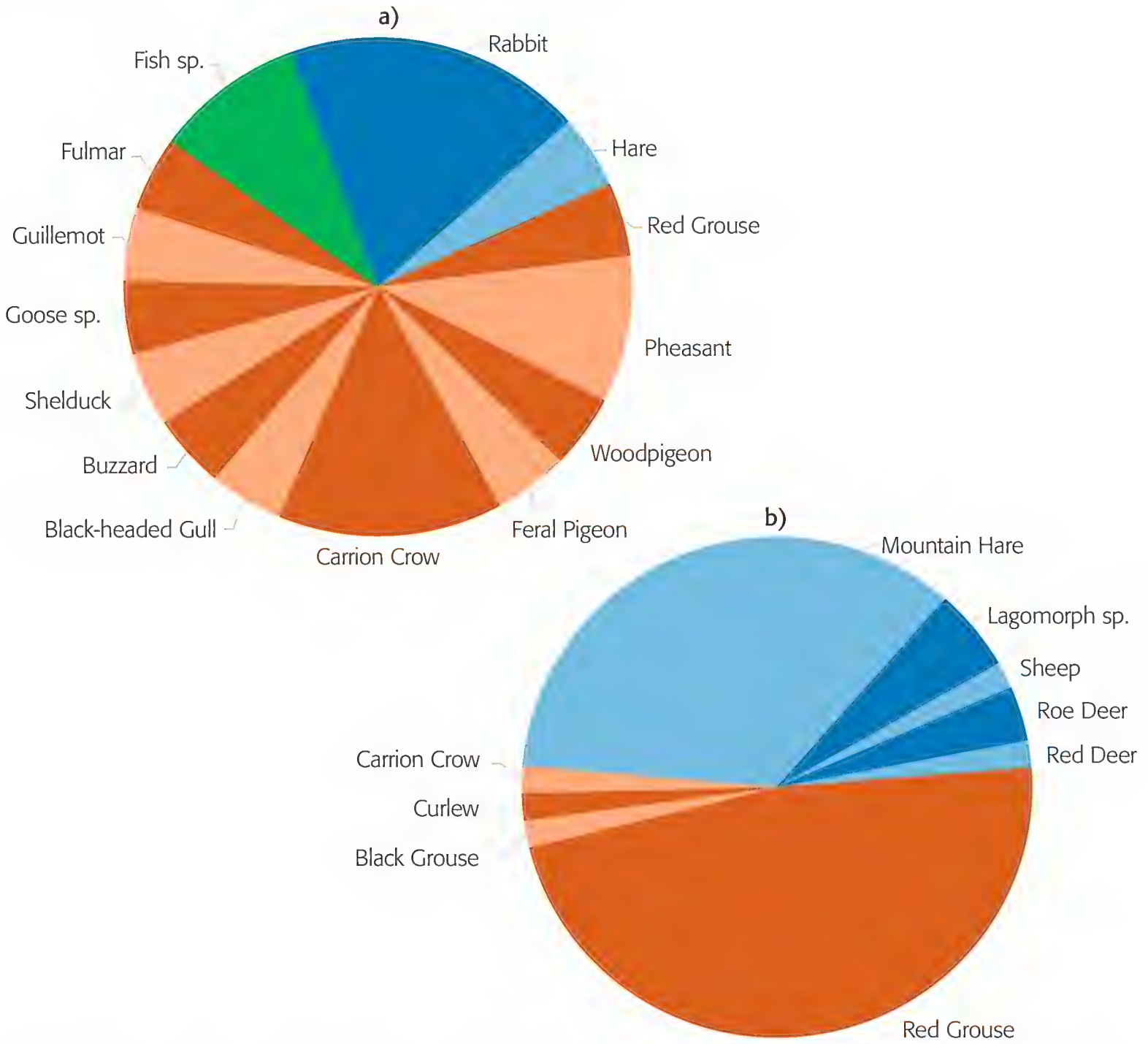

Figure 1. Results of a study of White-tailed Eagle prey remains carried out in October 2017 comparing those from (a) Territory T91 (Fife) and (b) Territory T92 (Angus).

There have been several changes to the Angus pair since birds first nested in 2014. The original female disappeared in winter 2015/16. The second male was recorded at the nest site in February 2017 but either failed to bond with the newly arrived female '11RedZ' or was ousted by '09TurquoiseZ'. To date, the territory at T91 in Fife has had the same breeding pair since 2013, compared to a total of five different individuals at T92 in Angus. A similar high turnover of breeding birds, detected by the increasing frequency of individuals below typical breeding age, has been found to be linked to illegal persecution in Golden Eagles *Aquilla chrysaetos* (Whitfield *et al.* 2004).

These observations also highlight the value in being able to identify individual birds and in having an interested community of volunteers and raptor study group workers searching for re-sightings and contributing to monitoring. Without vinyl wing tags enabling observers to identify individuals in the field it is unlikely that this occurrence would have been detected. In fact, without the tags, both adults would probably have been erroneously assumed to be the original pair that attempted to nest nearby in Angus in 2013.

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Owen W. Selly, RSPB Scotland, Tayside & Fife Office, Robertson House, 1 Whitefriars Crescent, Perth. PH2 0PA

Email: owen.selly@rspb.org.uk

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Plate 8. Juvenile Yellow Wagtail, Old Barns Farm, Crail, Fife, 4 August 2018. © *John Anderson*

Yellow Wagtails breeding in Fife in 2016–18

K.D. SHAW

Forrester *et al.* (2007) described the Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* as 'a scarce summer visitor and passage migrant restricted as a breeding species in the early 21st century to Lothian and Borders'. Smout (1986) described the Yellow Wagtail as a scarce passage migrant that had bred in Fife. Breeding had been suspected at Fife Ness in 1982 and had been proven in 1983, the first proven breeding in the county. However, the birds probably didn't breed the following year. Smout (1986) also commented that the species had become more frequent in Fife since the publication of Baxter & Rintoul (1935), who knew of only two records for south Fife, and Boase (1964), who also knew of only two north Fife records.

Anne-Marie Smout was, herself, involved in the next significant record when, in 2001, she, her husband Chris, Tom Glass and Nick Mutch recorded *flava* wagtails breeding at St Monans in the East Neuk of Fife. This record involved birds of both the *flava* and *flavissima* subspecies. The birds bred in a field sown with wheat. It had been a wet winter and the birds were attracted to a thick growth of Redleg *Polygonium persicaria* (Smout 2002). Breeding behaviour, again involving both subspecies, was noted in the same area in 2002 and 2003 (Ogilvie *et al.* 2003, Shaw *et al.* 2004). After this, Yellow Wagtail was a scarce passage migrant until 2016 (Elkins *et al.* 2016).

Plate 9. Yellow Wagtail, Old Barns Farm, Crail, Fife, 25 April 2018. © *John Anderson*

In 2016 and 2017, Yellow Wagtails bred or attempted to breed again in the East Neuk of Fife. The breeding area was flat farmland. In 2018, they were successful; three pairs bred with at least four juveniles seen. They nested in large winter wheat fields (the main one with two pairs was *c.* 250 m x 200 m) despite adjacent winter barley and other crops being available. Small puddles on a muddy track system appeared to be an important attraction to the birds as they were often seen feeding at these puddles especially at the beginning of the breeding season. This track was not often used by vehicles (perhaps up to 30 times per day) but the birds nested not far (*c.* 70 m) from a busy main road (vehicles passing on average every six seconds during daylight in May–July). In fact, one pair was on one side of the road and two on the other. One other interesting aspect was the apparent use of the same 'singing post' by all the males involved despite them nesting more than 100 m apart. This is very flat terrain with very few potential singing posts. The singing post was a farm sign just under 2 m in height. All the individuals involved were of the *flavissima* subspecies. The birds arrived back in late April or early May, apparently in two influxes. At least seven adults were present on 10 May. They were more secretive in June although 1–2 individuals, most often males, were seen regularly. After an extensive search of the area on 4 August, four adults and three juveniles were seen with 40 Pied Wagtails *Motacilla alba* in a grass field which was being grazed by horses *c.* 500 m from the nearest nesting area. The birds were last seen on 7 August.

Plate 10. Yellow Wagtail, Old Barns Farm, Crail, Fife, 21 April 2018. © *John Anderson*

Yellow Wagtails favour damp habitats, such as wet meadows, grazing marshes and river valleys, but there has been much greater use of arable habitats over recent years, with Oil-seed Rape, legume and root crops increasingly used for breeding (Balmer *et al.* 2013). In Lothian and Borders, the current population of 25–35 pairs is associated with arable fields, close to short-cropped grass areas. The birds feed on river margins, usually grazed by sheep or cattle, or river shingles with little or no vegetation, or strips of cut grass on road verges and coastal shingles. The birds often fly some distance between these feeding areas and their nests, which are in winter cereals, Oil-seed Rape or potato fields with most below 100 m (Murray *et al.* 2019). The BTO also report a drastic decline in the UK Yellow Wagtail population with a UK-wide decline of nearly 75% between 1967 and 2011 (Balmer *et al.* 2013).

Plate 11. Singing male Yellow Wagtail, Old Barns Farm, Crail, Fife, 22 April 2018. © *John Anderson*

Acknowledgements

I thank my co-observers John Anderson, Harry Bell, Will Cresswell, David Clugston and John Nadin. Thanks also to Graham Sparshott and Malcolm Ware and their commitment to the recording system in Fife. Finally, I acknowledge the huge contribution Anne-Marie and Chris Smout have made to birdwatching in the East Neuk. Lastly, I am grateful to my old friend James Dick who has trained me in the identification of cereal crops!

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Ken D. Shaw, 13 Chalmers Brae, Anstruther, Fife KY10 3BY.
Email: kenshaw495@gmail.com

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Plate 12. Sub-adult Spoonbill on South Ronaldsay, Orkney, April 2018. © *Ian Cunningham*

Successful breeding by Spoonbills on Orkney in 2018

S.P. HOLLINRAKE, A.J. LEITCH, C.J. CORSE, J.B. RIBBANDS, C. HALL, C. BIONDO & R. ETHERIDGE

The Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* is a well-known recent colonist to the UK from Europe with very small numbers now attempting to breed annually in England, since around 1998, after an absence of over 300 years. There have been three previous attempts where key breeding behaviour has been noted in Scotland: copulation (no nest) in North-east Scotland in 1998 and display and nest building in Dumfries & Galloway in 2000, followed by a pair fledging three young in Dumfries & Galloway in 2008 (Collin 2009, Holling *et al.* 2010). However, that changed in 2018 when a pair were successful in fledging at least two chicks at an undisclosed site on Orkney.

During the spring there had been a sighting of a sub-adult Spoonbill on Graemston Loch, South Ronaldsay from 25–27 May. This individual represented only the 12th record for the county which is surprising, given the number of wetlands and numbers seen annually in Scotland.

An unaged individual was seen at Loch of Wester, Caithness, on 27 May. On the same day one was seen flying north past Duncansby Head, Caithness, towards Orkney. Two individuals were present on 29 May and a single on the 30 May at Loch of Wester. On 30 May, an individual was also seen at Loch Scarmclate, Caithness.

However, in early July, a group of birdwatchers stumbled across these magnificent wading birds with three large young, confirmation that for only the second time in Scotland Spoonbills had bred successfully, and on Orkney of all places!

Plate 13. Adult Spoonbill with three well-grown chicks at the nest site on Orkney, 7 July 2018. © *Christine Hall*

Throughout July there were occasional reports of a single adult Spoonbill on South Ronaldsay. Nearer the end of July, two adults were being seen more regularly on South Ronaldsay. This is the only report that we are aware of, that both adult birds were present at the same locality. Away from Orkney, an adult bird (though possibly different individuals on different days?) was seen at Loch of Mey, Caithness occasionally during 1–8 July.

Plate 14. Close-up of the chicks (also known as 'teaspoons') on site, Orkney, 7 July 2018, from a distance using a telephoto lens. © *Christine Hall*

Plate 15. Pair of Spoonbills on South Ronaldsay, Orkney, 27 July 2018. © *Steven Charlton*

Plate 16. Two recently fledged Spoonbills at Loch Liddell, South Ronaldsay, Orkney, August 2018. © *Ian Cunningham*

It was not until early August that another local photographer (Ian Cunningham) captured two recently fledged birds on Graemston Loch, South Ronaldsay.

The family party departed Orkney in early August and we assume the same birds were picked up across the water at Loch of Wester, Caithness on 4 August. They were seen here for a brief period before departing south and we lost track of them.

A truly stunning ornithological event, though not totally unexpected in Scotland, not many would have put money on the second successful Scottish breeding attempt being on Orkney.

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Alan Leitch, The Willows, Finstown, Orkney KW17 2EJ.
Email: alan.leitch@rspb.org.uk

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Comment provided by RBBP

Mark Holling, Secretary of the Rare Breeding Birds Panel comments as follows: *"This record of Spoonbills breeding in Orkney came as a real surprise! The only other confirmed Scottish breeding record (Dumfries & Galloway 2008) was also an unexpected record but one that proved to be a one-off. It will be fascinating to see if the events in Orkney are repeated. A colony of Spoonbills was established in 2010 in Norfolk and breeding there has been annual, with 28 pairs in 2018, and in both 2017 and 2018 a pair bred at another new site, in Yorkshire. Birders should be aware that pairs located in the spring which linger in the area may attempt to breed; any observations should only be from a distance so as not to disturb any nesting birds and the site should not be publicised - inform the local recorder and/or the RBBP only."*

Plate 17. Second-calendar-year Arctic Terns, Gott Bay, Tiree, Argyll, 16 July 2018. © *John Bowler*

Increased numbers of summering second-calendar-year Arctic Terns on the Isle of Tiree, Argyll

J. BOWLER

Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisea* in their second calendar year (2cy), previously known as 'portlandica phase' birds, were formerly scarce in Scotland and indeed in Europe generally (Svensson *et al.* 1999), with birds of this age-group believed largely to spend their first 'northern' summer in the southern hemisphere dispersing widely throughout the Southern Oceans (Harrison 1983). This age class of Arctic Tern received no mention in either *The Birds of Argyll* (ap Rheinallt *et al.* 2007) or *The Birds of Scotland* (Forrester *et al.* 2007) but since 2002, increasing numbers of 2cy birds have been recorded from the Isle of Tiree, Argyll, as well as on the Orkney Isles (Martin Gray and Alan Leitch pers. comm.) and presumably elsewhere in Scotland. Second-calendar-year Arctic Terns are easily identified amongst summer-plumaged adults by a combination of their white forehead patch, all-black bill, faint black carpal bar on the upperwing and absence of long tail streamers (see Plates 17–21), although there can be considerable variation in plumage details between individuals.

On the Isle of Tiree, 2cy birds have been noted in amongst groups of breeding Arctic Terns since at least 2002, when 10 birds were noted at a coastal site on 6 June and there were 20 at the same site on 25 June 2003. Birds of this age-class were noted in most subsequent years but no count exceeded 20 birds until 2013, when there was an unprecedented arrival to an Arctic Tern colony at Loch a' Phuill in the SW of the island. The first 2cy bird was noted at the loch on 19 June 2013 increasing

Plate 18. Second-calendar-year Arctic Tern, Loch a' Phuill, Tiree, Argyll, 10 July 2018. © *John Bowler*

to 36 on 20 June, 210 on 28 June, 350 on 30 June, 450 on 3 July and to an estimated 1,200 birds on 5 July. In 2014, numbers of 2cy birds peaked at 325 birds at two sites on 7 July, in 2016 at 600 birds at one site on 8 July, in 2017 at 1,600 birds at four sites around the island on 10 July and in 2018 at 650 birds at five sites on 9 July. Since 2013, numbers of 2cy birds on Tiree have often far exceeded the known output of juveniles from the island in the previous year, with some 200–400 pairs producing only 60–250 young per annum in 2012–17, indicating that many of the 2cy birds seen must be coming from colonies elsewhere.

Patterns of arrival and departure of 2cy Arctic Terns on Tiree differ markedly from those of adult birds, with the very first 2cy birds not noted until the end of May (earliest was 29 May 2011), whereas adults usually start arriving from the third week of April. Numbers of 2cy birds increase through June reaching a peak in early July and then drop away rapidly in mid July, with no August records to date. By contrast, adult Arctic Terns typically remain on Tiree in good numbers well into August, particularly when breeding success has been high, whilst other adults, plus their juveniles, pass through in September and October, presumably from more northerly breeding sites.

Plate 19. Second-calendar-year Arctic Terns in flight at Gott Bay, Tiree, Argyll, 8 July 2016. © *John Bowler*

Plate 20. Second-calendar-year Arctic Terns (with a few adults), Gott Bay, Tiree, Argyll, 8 July 2016. © *John Bowler*

Plate 21. Second-calendar-year Arctic Terns (with a few adults), Gott Bay, Tiree, Argyll, 8 July 2016. © *John Bowler*

Increased numbers of 2cy Arctic Terns have also been recorded in the last decade on Orkney, with tens or even hundreds of birds of this age class noted in some years (Martin Gray and Alan Leitch pers. comm.). Numbers appear lower on the Outer Hebrides, where only a few 2cy Arctic Terns are noted each year (Outer Hebrides Bird Reports), although almost 70 were recorded in 1999 and there were at least 20 in a colony on South Uist in 2009, 2015 and 2016 (Rabbitts 2013, 2019). Recent high counts of 2cy Arctic Terns from sites in England such as 84 at the Black Law tern colony on Lindisfarne, Northumberland on 2 July 2017 (Ross Ahmed pers. comm.) suggest that this phenomenon is not confined to Scotland. It would be interesting to discover if other parts of the UK and indeed Europe have experienced similar increases in occurrence. The reasons behind the recent observed increase in 2cy Arctic Terns in Scotland are not known but it would seem possible that changes in food availability in the Southern Oceans and/or in the coastal waters around Scottish tern colonies may be factors.

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John Bowler, Pairc na Coille, Balephuil, Isle of Tiree, Argyll PA77 6UE.
Email: john.bowler@rspb.org.uk

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Graham J. Wren 1936–2018

Graham Wren was a true countryman and a loyal friend to many in Scotland. Sadly, he ran out of steam back in October 2018 after returning home from a short SOC lecture tour; an untimely end for a charismatic figure who touched so many lives.

Graham was born near Oxford and maintained links to the city and surrounding countryside throughout his life. It was no surprise to hear at the celebration of his life that he had learned to talk before he could walk; he was an excellent raconteur with a memory for quirky detail and numerical fact. Numbers collected in his head and littered his anecdotes, dates in particular. Friends' birthdays and ages were flawlessly remembered; he remembered one friend's age because when he met him, he was exactly half the age of another friend. Clutch sizes, first egg dates, the number of successful nest boxes in a scheme, butterflies seen in a transect, could be (and frequently were!) recounted in conversation.

He did his National Service in Bahrain with the RAF, a formative adventure fuelling his love of travel, natural history and photography and returned to study dairying at Nottingham University in 1960. In line with many field naturalists of his generation, Graham 'collected' ...and birds' eggs, butterflies and more recently, animal and bird skulls gave him an in-depth knowledge of natural history. Graham was one of the earliest members of the West Oxfordshire Field Club, founded in 1963. He served on the club's committee for many years and became its president in 2003. He was a man of routine, never one to reinvent a wheel and his mindset and memory were ideally suited to long-term studies. After purchasing one of the first Nikon Fs from Morris Photographic in Oxford, he repeated the purchase with subsequent Nikon models over the next 40 years, trading in each meticulously maintained camera after quite considerable use.

Plate 22. Graham Wren and Nick Christian (right) visit to Eilean nan Ròn, Sutherland, June 2000. © *Steve Cooper*

Graham's mentor in bird and nest finding was Bruce Campbell and Bruce encouraged a project that Graham was to actively pursue for nearly 50 years. In 1967, armed with his Nikon F and a 50 mm lens, he started to photograph the nest, eggs and breeding habitats of all British birds - a goal that saw him travel to most parts of the country and brought him into contact with many of the top field-workers. In the early 1980s he submitted a small portfolio of his seabird photographs and was awarded Associateship of the Royal Photographic Society (ARPS). Steve Cooper was an early introduction in the Forest of Dean and they teamed up to visit Scotland through the 1970s, meeting the Rae brothers in Aberdeen, Bob Swann, Eddie Balfour, Desmond Nethersole-Thompson, Keith Brockie and many others along the way who were added to Graham's extraordinarily long list of friends.

During this time, Graham worked for three years on the Farne Islands - a defining experience for him - but he also managed to squeeze in annual visits to Scotland. He particularly liked islands, with trips to the Isle of May, St Kilda, Canna and many others. He took part in two organised tours to the Hebrides in 2018 and also revisited Handa, his first Scottish island, exactly 50 years after setting foot there. Throughout the 1980s, Graham was part of a small group of largely Scottish-based ornithologists who explored Scandinavia. These trips allowed him to photograph nests of a number of birds he only knew as winter visitors here.

Graham was a meticulous observer and recorder of change, building sequences of photographs to illustrate his many talks. 'Our Changing Countryside' was one of his most popular and Graham added and updated it regularly. It documented change to agricultural habitats and the consequential losses and gains of wildlife. In recent years he was alarmed at the decline in the Puffin population and the changes in management on the Farnes, explained in his most recent talk, 'Forty Years on The Farnes' which again showcased how long-term studies, backed with photography, can help a wider understanding of the changes taking place around us. It was the detail that interested him and the opportunity, with increasing age to reflect on change, but Graham also lived very much in the present. He was active and busy, loyal to his friends, and took an interest in their lives and experiences, taking the time to enquire and discuss at every opportunity. Understanding the importance of his photographic record, in recent years Graham prepared sets of his nests and eggs slide collections and placed them with the SOC, the National Museum of Scotland, and the BTO, where he hoped they would be cared for and provide a future source of reference.

The final paragraph from the eulogy, delivered by Dr John Cobb of the West Oxfordshire Field Club, offers a flavour of the Graham that many of us will remember: 'although he once arrived for a dawn chorus in full camouflage kit, we shall remember Graham as being dapper and occasionally somewhat flamboyant. The last time most of us saw him was at our party in August. He was resplendent in pink shirt, pink tie, pink waistcoat - and shorts. The overall effect was magnificent. As someone put it, once Graham had arrived, you felt the party had begun.'

He will be greatly missed.

Pete Moore and Steve Cooper

Plate 23. View north from Carn Aosda, Glenshee, Perth & Kinross, February 2007. © *David Palmar/photoscot.co.uk*

Experiences of an improving birder

D. PALMAR

Over the years, my wife and I have been to lots of wildlife meetings and excursions, including the Glasgow Natural History Society, Scottish Wildlife Trust, Clyde branch of the SOC and RSPB, all of which meet in Glasgow, and all of which run excursions. This, together with attendance at Argyll Bird Club meetings and excursions, and excursions run at SOC conferences, enabled us to build up our experience, while enjoying the company of some excellent bird and other wildlife experts.

We have also participated in several surveys for the BTO. Most of you will already know that the BTO is an independent, charitable research organisation, combining professional and citizen science to inform the public and environmental policy and benefit bird populations. BTO organises a broad range of surveys in which you can participate, requiring different levels of expertise. Even beginners can participate in some of them, so don't be put off by lack of experience!

Amongst these surveys are:

BirdTrack - enabling you to upload either a complete bird list for a location, or simply roving records, from places where you were going and probably making a list anyway. app.bto.org/birdtrack/main/data-home.jsp

Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) - more of this later. www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs

Other surveys record garden birds, nests, heronries, water birds and wetland birds. www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/core-surveys

One of the first we did was the Ptarmigan survey in 2006, where we climbed seven mountains (easy ones!) before we saw our first Ptarmigan, which promptly flew off! Our persistence was rewarded on the eighth mountain, where we were able to see not only white Ptarmigan in winter plumage, but on returning to the same spot in August, to see a Ptarmigan mother with several chicks.

Next, we participated in recording for the *Bird Atlas 2007–11*, taking on four tetrads, each requiring two visits, over the four years, so spreading out the effort. The non-estuarine bird survey in 2015/16 involved simply one walk along a short stretch of coast, recording the environment and the birds. We have also entered records into BirdTrack for several locations over the years, including last session's Clyde branch excursion to Ardmore.

I have also attended several one-day training courses run by BTO staff. The first was a BBS course on east Loch Lomondside run by James Bray a number of years ago now. I was immediately impressed by how he could identify simply by sound, birds which I could not see and of which in many cases I was not even aware at the time. Up till then I had been mainly a 'visual birder' but I realised how identifying birds by sound could help me to improve my bird detection skills, and enhance my enjoyment of bird watching. I also discovered how short 25 m is and what length 100 m is in the field! (The reason for learning this will become evident later, if you don't already know!)

A couple of years passed, during which my wife and I gained a bit more experience in bird sounds by going out with various groups of experts mentioned above. Then at a meeting of the Argyll Bird Club it was announced that there would be another training day in 2016 in Kilmartin, this time run by BTO Scotland's Ben Darvill. We had previously attended a couple of talks by Ben and found them to be informative, amusing and memorable, so we had rapidly become fully paid up members of the Ben Darvill Fan Club!

The BBS survey

I said to my wife 'We'll just go to the BBS course (which only cost £5) - we don't need to take on a square' - but of course we ended up taking one on, and I'm glad we did! We had a choice of randomly allocated squares, and ours turned out to be in the forest near Inveraray, which was part of the national forest estate managed by Forest Enterprise Scotland. I contacted the local forest district office and was granted permission to take a vehicle into the forest on specific dates to carry out this survey, arranged in advance when no forest operations were due to take place, with backup dates arranged in case of inclement weather. (The good news is that if you were to do a bird survey in poor weather, you would under-record the birds as they go into hiding, so you should only go out surveying when it's not raining!)

Plate 24. Loch Fyne from above Auchnabreac, Inveraray, Argyll, May 2017. © *David Palmar/photoscot.co.uk*

To ensure that as far as possible comparable results are obtained from different observers, there is a standard method of carrying out the BBS coverage. Each survey is done in a 1-km OS grid square, and consists of two roughly parallel transect routes across the square, each 1 km long, and separated by at least 200 m from each other. The transects obviously must be walkable and may have to deviate a bit to avoid obstacles, but once you have initially designed them, they stay the same every year.

Each year you take a note of the main habitat types along the transect route of the survey, checking that they haven't changed between the first and the second visit. The idea is to survey one transect in five 200-m sections, then stop surveying during the walk to the second transect, then start surveying again.

Once our square had been approved by the BTO's regional organiser, I drew some lines on an aerial photo on the BBS website to represent the ten 200-m-long sections of the two separate 1-km-long transects through the square which we needed to cover (Plate 25), and printed it out, together with some guidance and recording sheets which are provided, on which to note the various birds we would record, and a list of two-letter codes for each species, e.g. WR for Wren.

I also downloaded a useful (free) app called Offline Maps, which uses your GPS position to show on your phone, where you are on either 1:50,000 or 1:25,000 OS maps.

On entering the forest, we confirmed what I had suspected from Google satellite view, and from

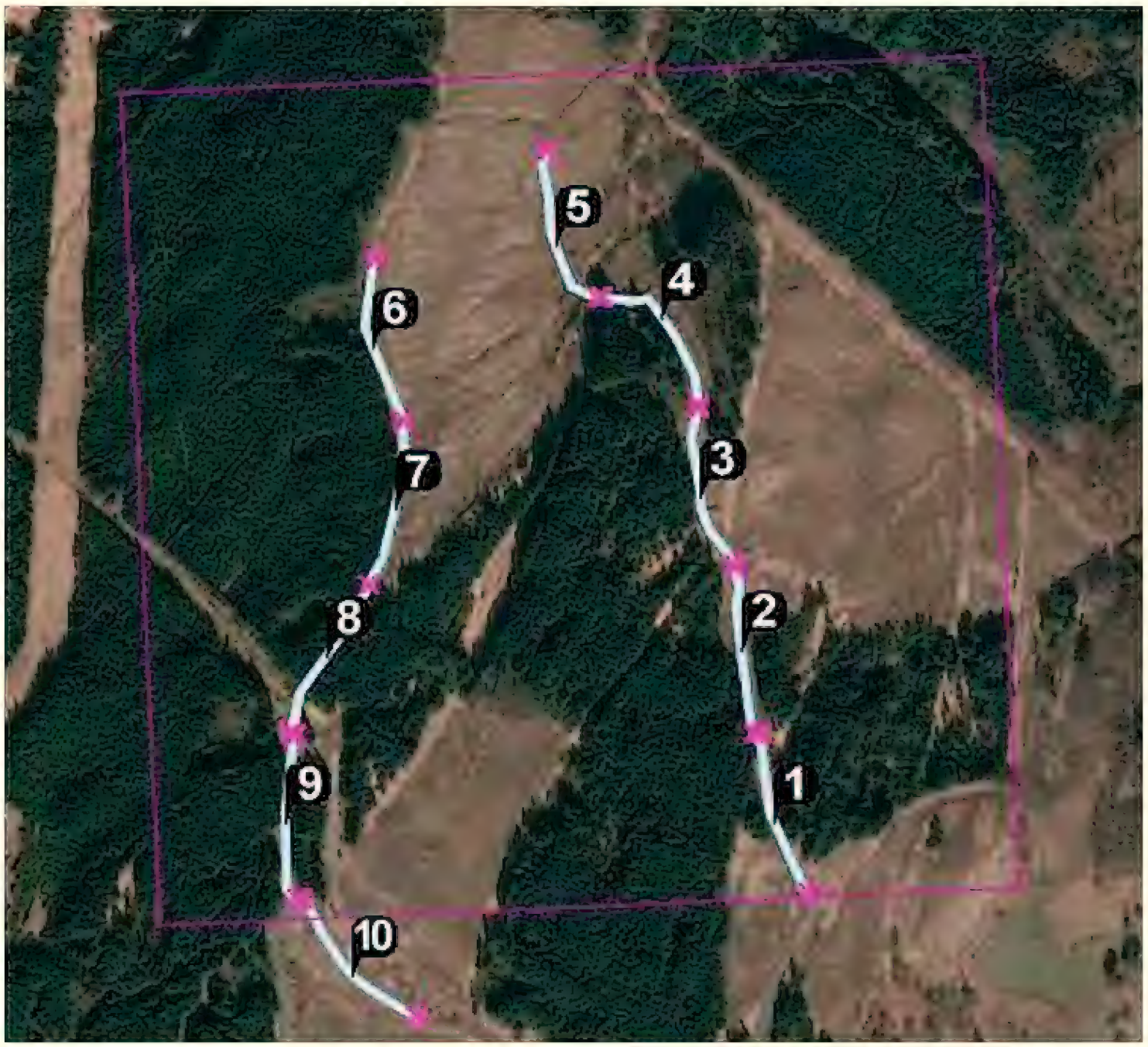

Plate 25. Satellite view of BBS square transects Image © *2018 BTO, Bing Maps*

the forestry road information provided by Forest Enterprise Scotland, that we could drive exactly to the first transect. This made it easy to survey without getting up too early!

It's better to do the BBS in the early morning, as early as you can get to the square. We started between 07:00 and 08:00 hrs, with the aim of finishing by 10:00 hrs. The important thing is to be consistent from year to year, so that trends can be deduced.

On the first survey in 2017, we recorded birds and how we first noticed them (e.g. by sight, call or song). We did an early visit in May and a late visit in June, mainly listening out for bird song, and trying to work out whether the birds were within the nearest 25 m, between 25 and 100 m away, or beyond 100 m on either side of us - somewhat challenging when in a forest, so the distance was a 'best guess' scenario.

The reason for the distance being recorded is that BTO have a detectability algorithm, which allows them to extrapolate from your data what the total population of each species is likely to be. In 2017 the forest was full of Chaffinches, Wrens, Robins, Coal Tits and Willow Warblers, and with Meadow Pipits in the scrubby clearings, but nothing unusual was noticed.

Back home, I typed the results into the BTO's BBS website, using the two-letter codes for each bird in every 200 m section.

The second year, 2018, was a bit more varied, with in addition Crossbills, a Siskin, and a Cuckoo. On the first visit, I wondered at the beginning of the first transect whether I had heard a Tree Pipit, so I put it down with a question mark and tried to remember what the mystery bird had sounded like.

Plates 26–27. Tree Pipit in parachuting flight (left) and singing (right) near Inveraray, Argyll, May 2018. © *David Palmar/photoscot.co.uk*

At the end of the 10th section, I confirmed the Tree Pipit diagnosis, as we saw and heard it in full display song flight, taking off from a tree and landing in the same tree or a neighbouring one, and making a typical song like a Meadow Pipit, but with "pew, pew pew" at the end. On previous excursions with the RSPB and SWT, an expert birder had said "That's a Tree Pipit!", but this was the first I had diagnosed and been sure of myself, which was quite exciting! Having finished the survey, I even managed a few snapshots of it (Plates 26–27). Later, I listened to the Tree Pipit song on xeno-canto.org (a website which has thousands of bird songs and calls, and is free to use).

In summary, doing a bird survey doesn't need to be too onerous. There are surveys at different levels. It is an enjoyable and fulfilling way of making good use of a bird watching experience, and contributing to society in these days of political and environmental uncertainty. If you haven't tried one before, why not start now? It's a great way to focus your bird watching, have fun and help you learn while adding to the sum of human knowledge!

David Palmar

NEWS AND NOTICES

SOC Annual Conference and AGM

22–24 November 2019, Atholl Palace Hotel, Pitlochry. Programme and booking information will be enclosed with the June issue of *Scottish Birds.*

Waterston House

Optics demo day: Sunday 7 April, 10am–4pm, Free Event. Looking for your first pair of binos? Or thinking of an upgrade? Come along to our annual spring optics day to try out a wide range of binoculars and telescopes to try out in field conditions. Or pop in for some free, friendly expert advice. If there are any models that you are particularly interested in looking at, please let us know in advance and we will do our best to have these available for you to try at the event. Call the office on 01875 871330 or email birdingofficer@the-soc.org.uk

Wildlife Printmaking: 2 March to 10 April 2019
Waterston House welcomes a group of printmakers inspired by wildlife for a joint exhibition. Carry Akroyd, Babs Pease, Kelly Stewart and Susie Wright each bring their own sensitivity to the subject while sharing the use of printmaking, and screen-printing in particular, as a common language. As illustrated by 'Noisy Guest' (Plate 28) by Carry Akroyd, the exhibition is likely to be high in colour and bold in composition, a perfect spring display. Carry Akroyd explains that 'Noisy Guest' references the way that John Clare described Corncrakes in one of his poems due to their incessant but unseen presence. This is a feeling that the artist herself experienced in the Hebrides over many years but also now closer to home on the English Fens where Corncrakes have been reintroduced.

Plate 28. Noisy Guest. © *Carry Akroyd*

Plate 29. Fieldfares. © *Jane Smith*

Coast to Coast - Kittie Jones and Jane Smith:
13 April to 22 May 2019
Kittie Jones and Jane Smith present a joint exhibition at Waterston House that reflects their shared interests and sources of inspiration albeit from their respective view points on the East and West coasts of Scotland. Jane and Kittie got to know each other in April 2018 during a week-long drawing trip to the Isle of May. As artists working out in the field, they understand the power of art to bring the stories of the natural world to life. Both see this as a key aspect of their practice. Kittie explains: 'At the end of our week on the Isle of May, we had an exhibition for everyone living and working there. The

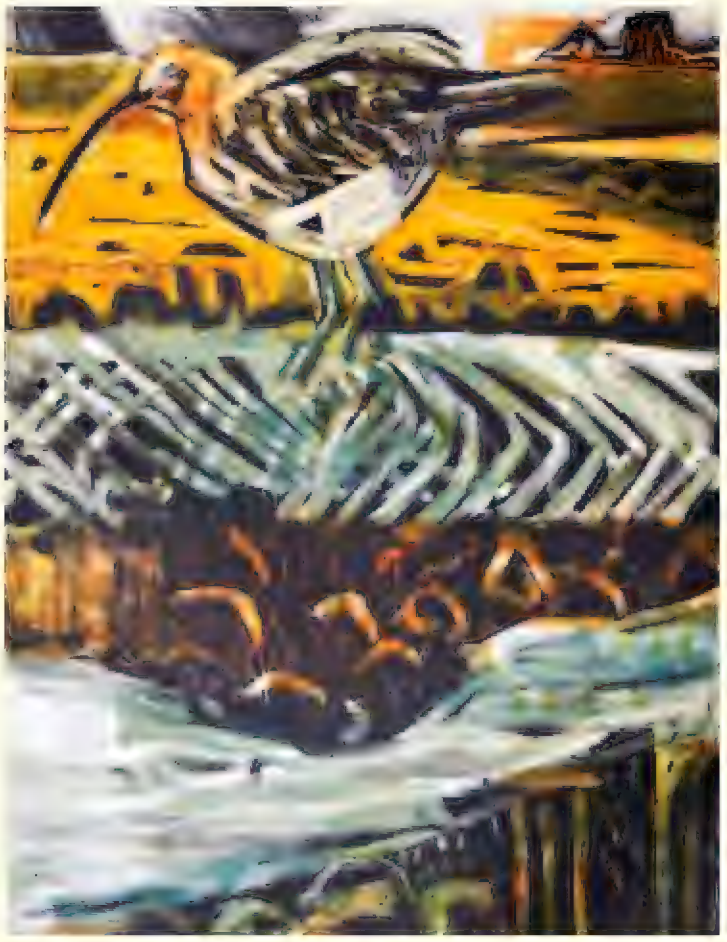

Plate 30. Feeding Curlew. © *Kittie Jones*

rangers and researchers commented on how inspiring it was to see us taking in the detail of a single location over the course of a day. Unlike us they didn't feel able to stop and appreciate the change of the light, movement of birds, mammals and weather - and these are people who are totally engaged with the natural world! This made me think and understand my role as an artist better - if I can instil in people that sense of joy and pleasure from taking time to look and experience a place, this is a powerful message for our times.'

During their island adventure they discovered that they had much in common. Born in England, both have made Scotland their home and draw their inspiration from the Scottish landscape. Jane in Argyll with the southern Hebrides a boat ride away, Kittie in Edinburgh with the Forth coast and islands on her doorstep. They also share a background in printmaking and are both professional members of the Society of Wildlife Artists, each receiving a prize at recent SWLA annual exhibitions. They discussed the freedom that the right to roam offers people in Scotland; the challenges of being a woman in worlds dominated by men (the conservation and art scene still have a reputation for this) and the quiet activism of sitting in the landscape drawing. This exhibition is part of this exchange between two artists who are also both members of the SOC.

Greg Poole 1960–2018

We were very sad to hear of the sudden death of artist Greg Poole at the end of December. Greg exhibited on several occasions at Waterston House and was a hugely popular tutor on The John Busby Seabird Drawing course, held on the Lothian coast every June. His was inspirational and helped many artists to see and react to the natural world around us. He will be sorely missed but leaves a fabulous legacy.

Plate 31. Gannets, Bass Rock. © *Greg Poole*

Honorary Members

In October 2018, the AGM voted in two new Honorary Members (the first since 2011): Dave Allan and Vicky McLellan.

Dave worked for the SOC for over 13 years. Early in that time, he was involved heavily in the transfer to Waterston House of the Library and all the other equipment. Dave carved out his own niche in the Club. Dave helped in the Art Gallery development together with advice and assistance from the late John Busby. This has now become a major source of income for the Club. Secondly, Dave, along with the late Keith Macgregor, ran birdwatching courses on behalf of the Club and, never a man to miss an opportunity, recruited many members for the Club. Thirdly, Dave put his expertise in the field to good use by advising potential customers on the selection of optics. Finally, he provided weekend cover for Waterston House and attracted many people to come regularly, have a cup of tea or coffee and discuss the recent sightings or the latest exhibition.

Vicky has been involved with the Club for around 40 years and in many roles. She served on Council in the Regent Terrace days and was part of the team seeking a new location for the Club which eventually led to Waterston House. Vicky still does a considerable amount for the Club and helped Daphne Peirse-Duncombe run the 200 Club until it was wound up last year. Vicky is a stalwart of the Borders branch as was her late husband Campbell. Vicky continues to assist at conferences.

Branch Recognition Awards

Bob McCurley was presented with his Branch Recognition Award at the Tayside SOC indoor meeting in early December, having been unable to attend the Club's AGM in October. Bob joined the SOC in 1982, serving as a committee member before taking on the role of Treasurer (a post he held until 2015) and regularly leading branch field trips Bob has always been keen to help others enjoy birds and particularly younger people; he helped primary schools in Carnoustie to set up bird nest boxes and feeding stations. Now in his 80s, Bob still does regular WeBS counts and in addition to his ongoing involvement in his SOC branch, he supports local branches of the BTO, RSPB, SWT, and Dundee Naturalists.

Plate 32. Bob McCurley with his award, presented by branch Chair, John Campbell. © *Brian Brocklehurst*

Fellow 2018 Branch Awardees, David Clugston (Clyde) and Brian Smith (Dumfries), were also presented with their respective awards at local branch meetings.

In 1972/73, David was elected on to the Clyde Branch Committee, progressed through Vice Chairmanship and took over the Chair in 1976/77 for two years. His latest role was as the branch Treasurer - a post he held for seven years until he stepped down in April 2017.

One of David's outstanding qualities is his very friendly disposition making new people feel welcome at meetings, outings and conferences, for example. He recently volunteered to help mentor others in bird watching, as part of the local group's aim to involve younger people.

A very keen, active and knowledgeable birder, David was Secretary of the Clyde Bird Records Panel from 1998 to 2015. He has also carried out a lot of fieldwork for the local atlases. Always happy to share knowledge, enthuse and help others, David ran Introduction to Birdwatching classes for Glasgow University's Extra-Mural Department for about 30 years.

Away from the branch, he has served on virtually every SOC committee at one time or another. He has had several spells on SOC Council but his outstanding contribution has been serving on the Library Committee for around 35 years.

Brian Smith was recognised for the great energy, enthusiasm and direction he has given to Dumfries branch in his 12 years as Chairman, not to mention the previous 14 years as Secretary. Brian always gave a warm welcome to members and new comers at every meeting. He aimed to make the branch inclusive and active and encouraged everyone who attended our meetings to be involved. Even before taking up official roles in the branch, Brian had won agreement to bring students from the Barony College to branch meetings and outings, thus widening the profile of the Club to a new audience.

Brian was a key player in starting the branch spring away breaks, which have been running since 2004 and for many are a highlight of the branch year. Brian has represented the Branch on the Dumfries and Galloway Branches Committee which is responsible for joint activities. Since the new millennium, Dumfries & Galloway branches have together hosted the Scottish Birdwatchers' Conference three times

and Brian has been heavily involved in the planning and management of all these very successful events. He has also chaired the Dumfries and Galloway Region Bird Report sub-committee for over 10 years.

Branch updates

Central branch

At the branch AGM in October, outgoing Chair Roger Gooch stood down after ten years in the role. Roger also served for many years on SOC Council and at its December meeting, fellow trustees took the opportunity to give Roger a warm vote of thanks for his many years of commitment and contribution to the governance of the Club. Roger remains on the branch committee as a member and we welcome Rick Goater as the new Chair.

Birds in Dumfries and Galloway No. 28 (2017)

The latest report covering 2017 is now available from: Peter Swan, 13, Robb Place, Castle Douglas DG7 1LW, pandmswan@btinternet.com, 01556 502 144. Please make cheques payable to 'SOC Dumfries and Galloway Branches'. Cost: £6 for SOC Members, £8 non-members, plus £2 UK p&p if necessary. The publication is also available from SOC HQ.

Outer Hebrides Bird Report No. 14 (2014–2016)

This volume contains three years of bird sightings from 2014 to 2016 throughout the Outer Hebrides and the outliers, including St. Kilda. Also included are details of all species ever recorded in the Outer Hebrides. The report costs £13 inclusive of p&p. To find out details of how to order your copy please visit www.outerhebridesbirds.org.uk.

Borders Bird Report No. 34 (2017)

This 170-page report covers summaries of the 218 species recorded in Borders during the year, including the first Dark-eyed Junco for the region and accounts of Western Bonelli's Warbler and Black-browed Albatross, both of which were only the second records for Borders. An outline of bird watching at the increasingly watched Greenlaw Farm Pool in Foulden is also given, along with the annual ringing report. Copies are available from Malcolm Ross, 24 Netherbank, Galashiels TD1 3DH and are £8 plus £2 p&p. Alternatively copies are available at Waterston House.

Lothian Bird Reports 2014, 2015 and 2016

Work on these three reports is now well-advanced, and for an update on their publication and availability please visit the Lothian Recorder's page on the Club website.

Birds in South-east Scotland 2007–13: a tetrad atlas of the birds of Lothian and Borders

The breeding and wintering bird atlas covering Lothian and Borders edited by Ray Murray, Ian Andrews & Mark Holling (and not forgetting an additional team of eight) is now available.

If you ordered a pre-publication copy, you should have been contacted (and hopefully already have the book). If not, please email sescotatlas@gmail.com. A number of copies are also available for purchase at Waterston House and Viking Optics, Rose Street, Edinburgh for £40 (please check that stock is available if travelling). Postal orders (at £55.00 within UK) should be sent to the above email address and details will be sent on how to pay. The authors wish to thank 'The Birds of Scotland Fund' for financial assistance in producing this book.

Scottish and Parrot Crossbill identification

Since the beginning of 2012, the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) has been responsible for reviewing records of both Scottish Crossbill *Loxia scotica* and Parrot Crossbill *Loxia pytyopsittacus*, but only from outside their core breeding areas in Scotland.

Criteria used by SBRC to consider and asses such records of Scottish and Parrot and Crossbills were published on the SOC website at: www.the-soc.org.uk/content/bird-recording/ sbrc/identification-of-scottish-and-parrot-crossbills

SBRC has recently refined the identification criteria and these have been updated on the SOC website. We ask observers to consider the new criteria when submitting records of Scottish and Parrot Crossbills to SBRC.

Chris McInerny, on behalf of SBRC
Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk

Congratulations to Sarah Wanless

SOC members and seabird enthusiasts in particular will be delighted to learn that SOC member Sarah Wanless, or to give her full titles Professor Wanless, Fellow of the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology, Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, honorary professor at Aberdeen and Glasgow Universities, holder of lifetime achievement awards from the UK Seabird Group and the Pacific Seabird Group, the Zoological Society's Marsh Award for Conservation Biology and the British Ornithologists' Union Godwin-Salvin medal, has been named as one of its ten Outstanding Women of Scotland for 2018 by the Saltire Society.

The society recognises women from the fields of science, arts, culture and public life each year, and Sarah and other nine new inductees were honoured at an event in Glasgow recently. Recipients in previous years have included JK Rowling and Annie Lennox.

Sarah was born in Scarborough on the Yorkshire coast but migrated north to Aberdeen University in 1969 and remained there for her PhD under the supervision of Bryan Nelson. This involved three field seasons on Ailsa Craig in the Firth of Clyde. Visiting her study sites each day required a gruelling climb; by the end of her project she estimated she'd ascended Everest from sea level more than 20 times. For much of her career she was based at the Centre for Ecology & Hydrology in Banchory. She carried out pioneering work developing methods of monitoring numbers, breeding success and diet of some of Scotland's seabirds. In the late 1980s, she undertook some of the first radio-tracking studies of northern hemisphere seabirds. This work helped identify important foraging areas in the North Sea and highlighted the threats faced by seabirds from climate change and other human activities. Her team's research into the role of industrial sandeel fisheries and oceanographic change in the decline of North Sea Kittiwake populations was a key part of the evidence that led to a ban on sandeel fishing down the east coast. The majority of her research was carried out on the Isle of May in the Firth of Forth in collaboration with Mike Harris with whom she co-authored the 2011 (2nd) edition of the *The Puffin* published by Poyser.

She was the British Antarctic Survey's first female visiting scientist at Bird Island, South Georgia, where she spent two southern summers studying the diving behaviour of South Georgia Shags.

Vacancy - SOC Honorary Secretary

The Club's Secretary, David Heeley, has indicated that he will be standing down from the role at this year's Annual General Meeting (AGM) in November when he will have served for five years. Therefore, we are now inviting applications for this vacancy.

The Honorary Secretary is one of five office bearers, elected by the membership at the AGM, who works closely with the President, Vice-Presidents and Treasurer to ensure the effective operation of the Club as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation and in line with the provisions of the Charity's Constitution. The initial period of appointment is for two years from the date of the AGM election, with re-appointment being permitted on an annual basis. The Secretary becomes one of the Trustees of the Club and is expected to be aware of the legal responsibilities that this entails and to exercise these to the benefit of the Charity. A key responsibility is organising the quarterly meetings of the Club's Trustees (Council) and the AGM, which involves drafting the agenda and producing minutes. The Secretary is also a member of the Management Committee and is responsible in a similar manner for organising these meetings. The President may, at the discretion of Council, require the post holder to serve on and organise meetings of other Committees. In recognition of the importance of this post in terms of the Charity's governance, the Honorary Secretary may be awarded an annual honorarium for his or her contribution.

A more detailed remit for the role and a short application form are available on the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk/vacancies or can be requested from Waterston House. If you think you might be interested but would like more information, please contact the Club Administrator, Wendy Hicks: mail@the-soc.org.uk or telephone 01875 871330.

Plate 33. Skylark. © *Jimmy Maxwell*

Breeding Bird Survey – some reminiscences

N. ELKINS

I first began the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) in Fife during two pilot years of 1992 and 1993 when we were testing methodology. The survey was designed to replace and expand the Common Bird Census (CBC), which had begun in 1962 (to which I had contributed on a site near Stornoway in 1962 and 1963).

I have now surveyed one of my BBS squares annually since 1994, finishing my 25th season in 2018 (27 years if you count the pilot surveys). Along the first transect in the coniferous forest of this square, I originally attached pieces of green plastic to trees (not acceptable these days!), to mark the 200 m sections. Degradation of these (they faded to yellow after many years then disappeared, often with their trees) plus windthrow, felling and my own ageing (climbing fallen tree trunks became less easy!) meant that small changes to my route occurred several times. Inevitably, the structure of bird communities also altered, with declines in Coal Tits and Goldcrests in clearfell being offset by colonisation of Tree Pipits. The forest has a mire which held a large Black-headed Gull colony in the early years. This had become extinct by 1996 as predators were increasingly able to reach the nests. However, for a further 20 years, a few birds turned up in spring, as if there had been a collective memory of the former colony, but they never bred again.

I have also surveyed an arable farmland square since 1997 where the fields host fewer and fewer Skylarks, while Lapwings have disappeared altogether from a relatively birdless habitat. The farmer was very suspicious when I sought permission, but mellowed after the first couple of years when I told him of his (then) large Skylark population. His interest turned out to be linked to his provision of produce for supermarkets, to which he could claim wildlife-friendly farming. He occasionally phones after

receiving my annual letter, but always claims that the decline in birds can be blamed on Buzzards. Unfortunately, my pleas for wildlife margins and headlands has fallen on deaf ears, hence the decline in his Skylarks, exacerbated by the increasing use of poly tunnels. However, Grey Partridges are still present and a Quail in the same field in two non-consecutive years shows that nice surprises do occur. Brown Hares are also nearly always present although these are less frequent now. My farmer watches 'Countryfile', so perhaps the many 'wildlife-friendly' messages will eventually get through.

In 2000, a friend offered the use of his four-wheel-drive vehicle to access three upland squares in Perthshire. After seeking permission from keepers, we were able to drive (sometimes with my eyes closed as my driver negotiated some really scary hill tracks) up to the edge of the squares, two of them being above 750 m. These were fabulous, with Golden Eagle, Red Kites, Hen Harriers and migrant Dotterel among species recorded, and one square was awash with Mountain Hares. Unfortunately, we gave these squares up after five years, following the collapse of a wooden bridge as we drove across (safely - before it disappeared!), and my friend, now sadly deceased, chickened out after that. However, one of the higher squares has been surveyed four times since. The results of these later visits have been somewhat disappointing. For example, between 2000 and 2004, we recorded an average of 27 Meadow Pipits and 33 Mountain Hares. Both had halved in number by 2018 and enquiries seem to indicate a change in keepering, with perhaps some culling of hares (but the number of Red Grouse remained similar throughout!).

In all, I've surveyed nine different squares over the years, recorded about 140 species, and counted around 23,000 birds. I currently survey three squares; all my other Fife squares now being surveyed by new volunteers. All three are now more or less negotiable for my ageing muscles and I hope to carry on as long as possible. The BBS provides a focus for birding in the spring and early summer, the early rising to begin at 06:00 hrs taking me out at the best time of the day when everything is fresh and the birds all singing. The squares have a variety of habitats such as deciduous and coniferous woodland, open farmland, wetlands and former quarry workings. Late visits are always a little more awkward as vegetation is much taller by late May and June - if it's been raining earlier, one can finish uncomfortably saturated! Transects never conform to the ideal except in featureless uplands - rarely are field margins, paths or roads in the right place.

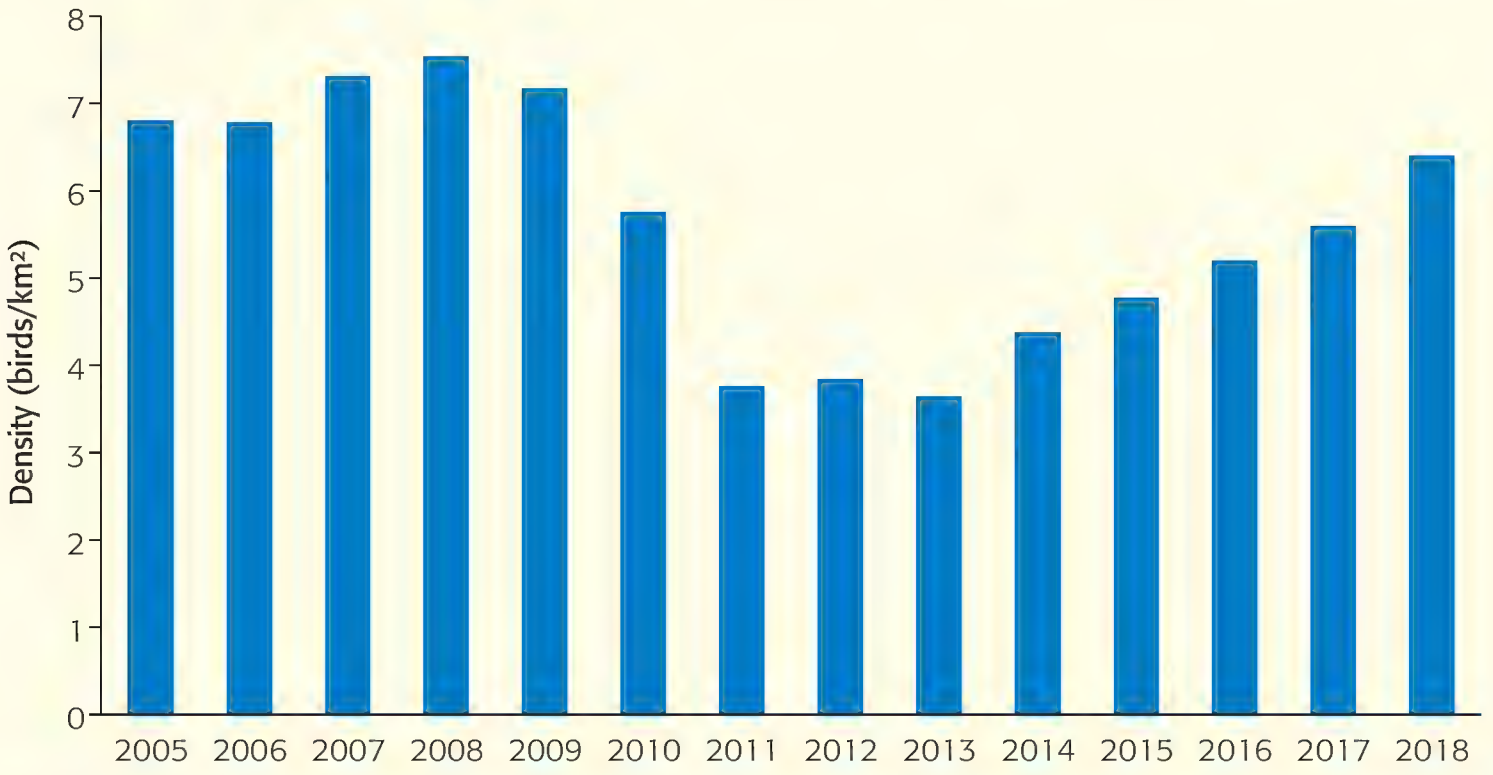

Figure 1. The density of Skylarks on Fife & Kinross BBS squares between 2005 and 2018, showing dips in population levels after the cold winters of 2009/10 and 2010/11. The mean number of squares was 59.

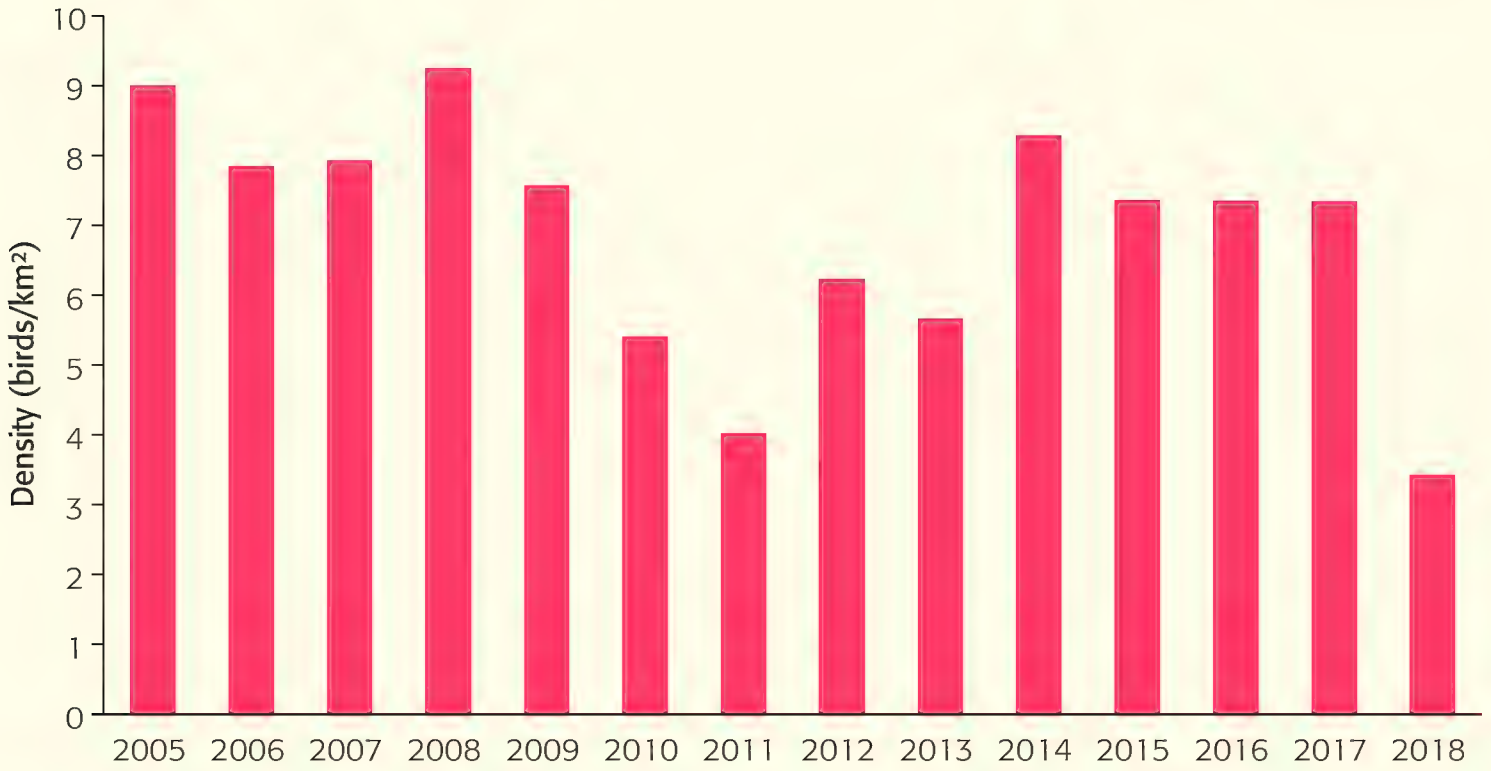

Figure 2. The density of Wrens on Fife & Kinross BBS squares between 2005 and 2018, showing dips in population levels after the cold winters of 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2017/18. The mean number of squares was 59.

The weather forecast plays a large part in the planning process. Most of the time the forecast is correct, but once or twice I have needed to abort because of fog over my square or the earlier onset of heavy rain. For upland squares, watching the forecast is even more vital as cloud can descend very rapidly at the onset of rain, as we once found on a recce. Not only can one not see the birds, but tramping about in wet upland peat bog in such conditions can be dangerous. These bogs often have ditches as my friend found to his cost when he suddenly disappeared into one behind me. Transects in such habitats should be simple, but map-and-compass (nowadays GPS) is necessary for the initial setup.

As BBS Regional Organiser for Fife and Kinross, I come across many interesting stories from the volunteers. My favourite is of one who took on the top priority square in the first year of BBS. Being a housing estate, I was doubtful of finding a volunteer. However, one gentleman surveyed it for 14 years with his wife until her ill-health made it impossible. During his tenure, he was due for a heart operation, so he asked his surgeon if it could be carried out before the breeding season! In the event, the op was late, so his wife pushed him round the square in a wheel-chair. At that time, it was the only square in which that could be achieved. That dedication just shows how volunteers perceive surveys such as BBS. Many (including me) are happiest combining birding with survey work.

Current BBS volunteers in Fife & Kinross surveyed 78 squares in 2018 (5% of the total area of the region), half of whom cover more than one square. The average number of years each has been surveying is nine (although ranging from one to 25), and three have been with BBS since it began. When I and my wife had both retired, she announced that there was no bar to us going away on holiday at any time of the year. Hang on, I said, a spring holiday has to be between the first and second visits to my (then four) BBS squares, thus limiting it to the middle two weeks of May. We've managed that now for 16 years.

I'm always eager to see the BBS results in the region and to see how the various species have fared. My annual BTO newsletter enables feedback to the volunteers. Some noticeable changes in bird populations have occurred. In the urban square mentioned above, Starlings and House Sparrows have declined by 78% and 53% respectively since the first year. Skylarks on my farmland square have declined by 83% since 1997. These and Wrens are hard hit by severe winters although both are able to bounce back (see Figures 1 and 2). Earlier years are omitted due to the smaller number of sites surveyed.

Ignoring the dips, Wrens have been remarkably stable over the years. Conversely, across the region, Blackcaps have increased by 66% and Chiffchaffs by 97%. BBS squares are chosen at random and, in our region, their habitats are representative of the region as a whole. With 5% of the total land area now covered, I like to think that these regional calculations are realistic.

Welcome colonists in one of my squares were Ravens until foresters felled the tree, a problem not only for nesting birds but also for us. Tree felling, whether by gales or man (and we have had both in the last few years), poses greater problems when one is faced with fallen trunks across the transect. Barbed wire fences are surmounted using a piece of carpet and flooded river banks need wellies, but all in all, we all look forward to the spring. It's not only the enjoyment that spurs us on to continue, but also the knowledge that BBS data are vital to conservation.

To those who have not tried this survey, I would certainly recommend it. Your BTO Regional Representative will tell you what is available. If you are uncertain about song and calls, then ask for an open habitat, as woodland birds are invariably detected by sound alone. As squares are chosen randomly by the BTO, this may not always be possible, but CDs of bird song and calls are provided if necessary. BBS is a long-term survey, ideally carried out by the same volunteer for many years. Your identification prowess improves over time and it is fascinating to record the changes. All your records can be entered and accessed on the BTO website but completing paper forms is equally valuable. While some squares are very difficult to survey, especially in upland areas, there are many very dedicated volunteers that necessarily walk miles for access. Such results are invaluable, so, if you are a hill walker, consider choosing one of these remote squares - even one visit is of value. All the details are on the BTO website at www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/bbs.

Norman Elkins, Breeding Bird Survey Regional Organiser, Fife and Kinross.
Email: jandnelkins@btinternet.com

Plate 34. Wren, Aboyne, North-east Scotland, November 2016. © *Harry Scott*

Plate 35. Brambling, Finnmark, Norway, June 2011. © *Harry Scott*

The UK Rare Breeding Birds Panel – an overview

M. HOLLING

The Rare Breeding Birds Panel (RBBP) was established in 1972 to maintain a secure and confidential archive of all records of rare breeding birds in the UK and to produce annual reports summarising the numbers and status of the species of these birds. These reports are published in British Birds and are available for every year since 1973. The most recent review, covering 2016 (Holling *et al.* 2018), was published in November 2018; it is typical that reports appear about two years after the breeding season to which they refer because it takes that long for all records to firstly become available and for the detailed analyses to be completed.

Why a Rare Breeding Birds Panel?

The original motivation behind the creation of the RBBP was to provide a home for records which might otherwise be lost to the ornithological record, and to this end the RBBP was created as an independent entity, totally separate from the RSPB, BTO, government conservation agencies and even the county bird recorder network. In the 1960s and 1970s especially, there was a small number of individuals who knew the whereabouts of rare breeding birds but felt unable to trust the 'authorities' and withheld records. This issue became widely acknowledged during the period

of the first atlas of breeding birds in Britain and Ireland (1968–72) with some important records not being submitted to that project. Others were submitted but only with incomplete or inaccurate locational information, greatly reducing the conservation value of the data. Since the early 1970s, the independent nature of the Panel has provided a different route, capturing those more sensitive records and, through building trust with data providers, has by and large been able to secure accurate records for ornithological record. All records received have of course always been treated confidentially and requests to mark records as particularly sensitive or for limited circulation are respected. Such records are nevertheless available for inclusion in the annual species summaries. Despite assurances and the total absence of 'leaking' of information from the Panel there are, sadly, a few individuals who remain tight-lipped about their findings, to the greater detriment of British ornithology. I will come back to this point later.

As the monitoring of birds in the UK has developed, the role of the Panel has expanded and the key role its data play in the conservation of breeding birds has become increasingly recognised and even more valuable. Some examples of where RBBP data have made a significant contribution in recent years include the State of the UK's Birds (e.g. Hayhow *et al.* 2017), Birds of Conservation Concern (e.g. Eaton *et al.* 2015), the wild bird indicators for the UK and Scotland (e.g. DEFRA 2018) and the IUCN Red List Assessment for Great Britain (Stanbury *et al.* 2017). While the updates on populations and trends provided by the RBBP help direct species conservation policy and, critically, priorities, there are also key benefits for site conservation. The data are used to support existing and proposed new sites such as Special Protection Areas (SPAs), which are designated under European law to protect named rare and/or vulnerable species, and also for management of specific sites (e.g. internationally designated sites that are not nature reserves owned by organisations). Several national species surveys have benefitted from access to RBBP data to help plan and direct effort; examples include the current Willow Tit survey and the recent surveys of the Peregrine.

Who is on the Panel?

The Panel consists of a small number of professional and amateur ornithologists selected for their experience and expertise; some also represent special interest areas or organisations. In recognition of the conservation value of its work, the RBBP is now funded jointly by the RSPB and the UK government via JNCC, on behalf of the country conservation agencies (SNH in Scotland); BTO also makes a small annual contribution. Panel members act in an advisory role. At present, the following individuals are members of the Panel: Mark Eaton (Chairman, representing RSPB), Dawn Balmer (BTO), Helen Baker and David Stroud (both JNCC), Ian Francis (independent), Andrew King (independent) and David Norman (independent). The bulk of the work collating, analysing and reporting data, and promoting the work of the RBBP is done by the professional (part-time) secretary, who is also a member of the Panel. In the entire history of the Panel there have only been four secretaries: Tim Sharrock (1973–83), Bob Spencer (1983–92), Malcolm Ogilvie (1993–2006) and Mark Holling (since 2006).

What area is covered?

Geographically, the remit of the RBBP has always been the United Kingdom, thus England, Scotland Wales and Northern Ireland, plus the UK Crown Dependency of the Isle of Man. The Channel Islands were added in 2012 so that the area covered is in line with other national reporting systems such as the BTO/JNCC/RSPB Breeding Bird Survey (BBS; e.g. Harris *et al.* 2018) and Birds of Conservation Concern (e.g. Eaton *et al.* 2015).

How are data collected?

The principal source of data is from the local recorder network. All 20 recorders in Scotland submit an annual return to the RBBP secretary; the deadline for receipt of data is 30 November of the year following the breeding season being reported on. Early submission of data enables the national figures to be computed sooner which means they are available as soon as possible for conservation; in particular national status and trends used by the RSPB for their conservation work (e.g. in the State of the UK's Birds and species survey planning) and reviews and management of designated sites (such as the SPA network) by JNCC and the country agencies.

Typically, SOC and other recorders collate the year's data for their local bird reports during the first part of the following year, which means they have an overview of the status of the rare breeding species in their areas in good time for the November RBBP deadline. The volume of work required varies from area to area, from fewer than five species/site records for Fair Isle and the Isle of May to 200–250 for Highland. Most recording areas typically submit 20–50 records annually.

The input of the recorders to the process is essential as, uniquely, they have the knowledge of the sites within their areas and the status of the breeding birds there - whether a species is likely to breed and how frequently a site is visited by birdwatchers, so the records received can be put in perspective. The partnership between recorders and the RBBP is one of the strengths of the relationship and contributes to the high level of respect accorded to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel and its data. The Panel is extremely grateful to the help and support of all the Scottish recorders who contribute to the database on an annual basis.

Other data come from a variety of sources, including national species surveys and regular fieldwork by conservation staff, local survey data including Goldeneye in Strathspey and some raptor studies, Schedule 1 submissions from licence holders, and RSPB reserves. Alongside the SOC, the RBBP is a partner in the Scottish Raptor Monitoring Scheme and we maintain a close relationship with the Northern England Raptor Forum. During the last national Atlas, we shared data at the tetrad or 10-km level to ensure full compatibility across both datasets, so that ornithologists of the future would not face the conundrums brought up by the first Atlas.

Which species?

What is a rare breeding bird? The definition has changed over the 46+ year history of the Panel, beginning with the very rare (30 or fewer breeding pairs) and the rare (30–300 breeding pairs) only, then incorporating all species provided special protection under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981). In the last ten years the definition of a rare breeding bird has been more clearly quantified, and it is now generally any species with a mean breeding population over the most recent five years for which data are available of fewer than 2,000 breeding pairs in the UK. Before a more numerous species is taken off the list, we carefully review recent records and look to see if the BBS can provide annual trends of that species. For breeding species, RBBP data complement the BBS, together providing a robust conservation tool.

Although most species on the list are on Schedule 1, this is not the most important criteria. All wild birds are of course fully protected at the nest, but because Schedule 1 has not, regrettably, been amended regularly since 1981, some of the rarest breeding species (such as Crane, Great White Egret and Icterine Warbler) still do not receive special protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act. Yet some species that are on Schedule 1 are much more numerous as breeders, for example Barn Owl, Kingfisher and Crossbill; these more numerous species are no longer on the RBBP list. The current list of species covered by the RBBP can be found on the RBBP website www.rbbp.org.uk.

It is important to remember that the criteria apply equally across the whole of the UK, and so from the Scottish perspective some species which are rare breeding birds in Scotland, but not further south, such as Great Crested Grebe, Nightjar, Marsh Tit and Reed Warbler, are not monitored by the RBBP.

Scotland is particularly important for a large number of rare breeding bird species, with the following regular breeding birds having their entire UK population nesting in Scotland: Common Scoter, Capercaillie, Red-throated Diver, Black-throated Diver, Slavonian Grebe, Golden Eagle, White-tailed Eagle, Whimbrel, Red-necked Phalarope, Green Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Greenshank, Arctic Skua, Common Redpoll and Snow Bunting, plus the distinctive races of Wren on Fair Isle and St. Kilda. Many other species have the majority of their breeding population in Scotland too, e.g. Whooper Swan, Pintail, Goldeneye, Osprey, Hen Harrier, Corn Crake, Dotterel and Redwing.

Figure 1. Distribution of all breeding season records of Shoveler submitted to the Rare Breeding Birds Panel (with grid references), 2006–2016.

There are other species on the RBBP list though which are often perceived as being 'common', perhaps because they are visible and occur more widely in the winter, but which are actually rare breeding birds! Several ducks fall into this category. Shoveler (5-year mean of 1,033 pairs, of which c. 130–150 breed in Scotland) (Figure 1), Pochard (701, fewer than ten) and Red-breasted Merganser. The latter has only recently been added to the list (2017) as a recent desk study indicated that the UK population was fewer than 1,800 pairs, of which the majority breed in Scotland, mainly along the west coast (Balmer *et al.* 2013). Records submitted to the RBBP from now onwards will enable us to track the changing fortunes of this scarce species.

How can you contribute?

So how do the work and objectives of the RBBP affect the everyday birdwatcher? The first thing to note is that *all* your bird records are important and should be submitted to the local recorder regularly so that they can feed into all systems, including local annual bird reports. The SOC recommends the use of BirdTrack as a means of submitting records and more information about bird recording in Scotland can be found on the SOC website at www.the-soc.org.uk/bird-recording/overview. Every record should have an accurate location associated with it, usually a grid reference, although BirdTrack can also create GPS coordinates which can be translated into grid references. A 4-figure grid reference is good to indicate the general area a bird is present in, but a 6-figure reference is best to pinpoint a nest site.

Next, be aware of what birds are doing and any behaviour indicating breeding. This can range from singing, pairs in breeding habitat, displaying birds or nest-building to the most valuable of all: records of confirmed breeding. Breeding is deemed to be confirmed at a site if the evidence points to eggs having been laid. Suitable observations would therefore obviously be a nest with eggs or young but also recently fledged young or nidifugous young (such as ducklings) and records of adults carrying food to a nest or faecal sacs from a nest. Remember you don't need to see or search for the nest, adults only carry beak-fulls of food if they are taking it to feed young birds. This is especially useful for passerines but even raptors carrying a single prey item over a distance are likely to be heading to their nest site or fledged young. Another useful behaviour is 'distraction display', such as very agitated waders (e.g. Greenshank, Little Ringed Plover) or wing-flapping ducks (e.g. Wigeon). By submitting a note of the evidence, the local recorder can better interpret the record for their RBBP submission. Where sexes can be distinguished in the field, note the number of males and female: a record of two Pochards might be of two males, two females or one of each; if the latter we can assume a pair, one step further towards confirmed breeding and so much more valuable! All records of birds in breeding habitat, especially rare breeding birds, at the right time of year for the species are important: we don't only want confirmed breeding records. This is because every record indicating a potential breeding pair at a site will contribute to the overall population compiled each year by the RBBP.

Some species are easier to find and to record than others, but our data holdings are heavily dependent on birders finding and reporting their records. Some species are surveyed regularly by professionals; examples of these in Scotland are Common Scoter, Slavonian Grebe and Red-necked Phalarope. There are a number of species for which we receive limited information and for which every additional record would make a valuable contribution - currently we are unable to monitor changes in the population because of the limited data received and the lack of annual data on defined survey plots. Many occur in less accessible areas of the Highlands though others are more widespread but are more elusive. Species we would like more records of include Wigeon, Red-throated and Black-throated Divers on breeding lochs, Goshawk (displaying birds in spring and birds in habitat in summer), Dotterel (all in montane habitats), Whimbrel and Greenshank (all except passage birds), Short-eared and Long-eared Owls (any birds in breeding habitat from April to July), Redwing (singing birds and pairs in breeding habitat) and Snow Bunting (all in montane habitats). Reference to the Bird Atlas (Balmer *et al.* 2013) will provide context of where to expect breeding birds. There are plenty of ideas for projects there, and even visiting birders from the lowlands or from outside Scotland can contribute by ensuring that their casual reports are submitted.

Although by definition these species are rare and potentially susceptible to disturbance, most rare breeding bird monitoring can be done from a distance without the need for a licence. The welfare of the bird must always be paramount and any action which might interfere with or jeopardise any breeding attempt must in all cases be avoided. Sightings of rare breeding birds in breeding habitat should not be publicised via bird news networks or social media; it is important that more unusual records are shared in confidence with the local recorder or the RBBP secretary, but otherwise it is best to keep information out of the public domain while the birds are still (potentially) breeding. This can apply to rare species where the only record is of a singing male, such as Icterine and Marsh Warblers, where a female may be present and starting a nesting attempt unseen in the area. The RBBP secretary can advise on whether other organisations, such as RSPB, should be involved; sometimes there is a need and a benefit in publicising an event to manage birders and photographers eager to see the birds (as has happened in recent years in England with, for instance, breeding Bee-eaters). In some cases, information should be kept confidential (other than RBBP and the recorder) for at least another season in case the pair return to the site. Further guidelines have been documented in a recording standards document available to download at www.rbbp.org.uk/rbbp-recording-standards.htm.

Feeding back to the birding community and conservation decision making

Our annual reports give the status of all the rarer breeding birds in the UK, with total numbers of pairs by recording area and by region. The numbers thus derived form a critical input to conservation decisions by conservation organisations such as RSPB and SNH, so every record of a rare breeding bird you submit helps that important cause. Annual figures are compared to previous totals and changes in range noted. Thus, in the 2016 report, we noted the highest ever reported number of Wood Sandpipers (37 pairs), the continued recent expansion and increase in Red-necked Phalaropes (70 breeding males at 23 sites) and the highest number of Goshawk territories (705, though this figure is still believed to be an underestimate owing to under recording; 174 of these were in Scotland). Away from Scotland, we documented record numbers of species spreading from the south: Avocet, Cetti's Warbler, Little Egret and Mediterranean Gull. There were, however, further declines in the numbers of Capercaillie, Hen Harrier and Montagu's Harrier.

Based on the records in our archive we can provide information to help inform other publications. We worked with the authors of Birds of Scotland to ensure the species accounts were based on the full breadth of knowledge at the time. We compile species review papers, such as the recent one on the changing status of Black-necked Grebes in Scotland (Holling 2015), and if requested we provide comments on other papers on rare

breeding birds (e.g. Avocet (Leonard 2018) and Spoonbill (Hollindrake *et al.* 2019). Individuals are invited to use our archives to produce species reviews and anyone interested should contact the Panel Secretary.

Filling the gaps

As complete as we aim our archives to be, we are very conscious that there are gaps in some of the details and even of some specific breeding records. Our files for Osprey in Scotland (though not in England and Wales) are incomplete because many of the records have been submitted only in summary form; this hampers our ability to maintain accurate annual numbers and to assist conservation initiatives to protect the species (for example the setting up of designated areas (e.g. Special Protection Areas) for conservation. We sometimes hear of records of really rare or unusual species nesting where we have no information - Snowy Owls on the Scottish mainland in the 1970s or 1980s is one frequently mentioned. Without verified data on dates and sites, any such records will never be part of the ornithological record. We would like to invite anyone with any knowledge of such incidents to come forward so that the ornithological record can be enhanced. You can check if the record is known to the Panel by looking at the library of historical RBBP reports - all but the most recent are available for free download from the RBBP website or by visiting the SOC library at Waterston House. Please contact the Panel Secretary at secretary@rbbp.org.uk if you feel you may have some 'new' information. It is immensely pleasing to be able to add to our ornithological knowledge for posterity; recently data on historical sites for Honey-buzzard and Golden Oriole have been added to our archives thanks to the foresight of the data owners.

Further information about the Panel and its workings can be found at our website www.rbbp.org.uk, or by contacting the secretary (details below).

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Mark Holling, The Old Orchard,
Grange Road, North Berwick,
East Lothian EH39 4QT.
Email secretary@rbbp.org.uk

A review of the biological recording infrastructure in Scotland

E. WILSON & R. TIERNEY

In 1988, the 'Biological Survey: Needs and Network' report was published by The Linnean Society of London. Written as the result of concern about the state and lack of co-ordination of biological recording in the British Isles, this report recommended - amongst other things - that "a co-ordinating commission be established as soon as possible, under the lead of an appropriate national body."

Huge steps have since been made towards joining up our biological recording community. Advances in technology (e.g. the advent of smartphone apps) and the greater accessibility of information online have also provided new opportunities for sharing records and greater awareness of how to contribute them through key channels such as Local Recorder Networks, BirdTrack, iRecord and the NBN Atlas.

Alas, despite this progress across the biodiversity sector, many challenges remain, for example: competing data flows; inaccessibility of records (often, but not exclusively, those collected by environmental consultancies or within academia); the effort involved in locating, obtaining and using data from multiple data providers especially across taxonomic groups; and, the expectation that records submitted and verified by volunteers can be provided for free (with no contribution to the costs of engaging participants nor collecting and curating data).

Joining up the dots

In 2009, Biological Recording in Scotland (BRISC) petitioned the Scottish Parliament to "urge the Scottish Government to establish integrated local and national structures for collecting, analysing and sharing biological data, to inform decision making processes to benefit biodiversity".

In response to the Petition, the Scottish Government established the Scottish Biodiversity Information Forum (SBIF) - a cross-sectoral group with representation from all sectors of interest - to take a strategic approach (by consensus) to the collection, collation and sharing of biological data across Scotland.

Over the past two years, a complete review of Scotland's biological recording community has been undertaken through interviews with over 40 key stakeholders, a public questionnaire that received 290 responses and four workshops attended by people from 39 organisations. The review process has facilitated the development of a detailed blueprint and business case to transform our biological recording infrastructure by 2025 that in turn would enable Scotland to be a global leader for biodiversity.

24 Recommendations

The review concluded with 24 recommendations to achieve such a transformation of Scotland's biological recording infrastructure through addressing problems associated with data flows, services, governance and funding. Fundamentally, the review articulates the need for substantially greater investment in our biological recording community, and presents a fully costed business case for public funding to cover perennial core operating costs.

Such investment would sustain an Open Data business model and establish a Scottish arm of the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), NBN Scotland, to provide in-country governance. Regional funding would revitalise the Local Environmental Records Centre (LERC) network across Scotland, while 'Super Partner' funding would enhance the support for major infrastructure providers such as the NBN Trust, national recording schemes and societies, natural history museum collections, the State of Nature Partnership and Invasive Non-Native Species Secretariat. In addition, the creation of a major Community Fund would scale up expertise, activity and outreach across Scotland through supporting the activities of local recording networks, individual recorders and verifiers, and

school or community groups in every local authority area in Scotland.

Potential benefits for the Scottish Ornithologists' Club, branches and members

If the funding model proposed by the review is achieved, it will make a big difference. Open sharing (with appropriate safeguards for sensitive data), and easy aggregation of and access to, biological records via an improved NBN Atlas will create the definitive evidence base necessary to inform decision-making and safeguard sites, species and habitats in Scotland. The Community Fund would be open to applications from birdwatchers and the SOC and its branches - especially to aid participation and to increase the availability of records for under-recorded sites or species. The development of BirdTrack and other major schemes and databases would be helped by enhanced funding, as would the curation of museum collections and provision of recorder support via LERCs that can be fundamental for species identification and engaging all generations in natural history.

More information about the SBIF Review is available at nbn.org.uk/about-us/where-we-are/in-scotland/the-sbif-review/

Ellen Wilson (SBIF Chair) and
Rachel Tierney (SBIF Development Officer)

Please send in your bird records

S.L. RIVERS

Add your pieces of information to the jigsaw to make the picture more complete

Please remember to send your records from 2018 to your Local Bird Recorder if you have not already done so. Many recorders encourage or even require records to be submitted via BirdTrack (app.bto.org/birdtrack) which is not as daunting as it may sound. Other recorders prefer to receive records directly - please contact your Local Recorder to discuss the preferred method of record submission. Individuals' sightings are the bedrock of the local bird report and collectively the information is vital to provide accurate and comprehensive details about our bird populations which in turn help advise conservation bodies. The contact details of your Local Recorder are listed on the inside back cover of *Scottish Birds*.

In 2019, why not try to make your record gathering even more useful. Submit 'complete lists' to BirdTrack. Take part in local and national surveys. Provide 'breeding codes' for rare and scarce breeding species (see RBBP article on pages 37–42). It's not all about rarities, but when you do find a bird that requires a description (locally or nationally) please ensure that notes and photographs are submitted to the Local Recorder. There is a facility within BirdTrack to submit details of local rarities which are then forwarded to the Recorder. In some cases, the descriptions received are too brief for acceptance by the local records committee. Please include as much detail as possible on the features used to make the identification within the description section of the online form. If you are unsure about the level of detail required then please provide an email address so that the Recorder can contact you.

Log the last dates of winter migrants in your local area, similarly record first and last sightings of summer migrants and of first dates for next winter's arrivals. This will add greatly to our knowledge of bird movements and fortunes and how they are changing. Records of unusual birds in gardens or unusually large totals of particular species also help gauge how resident species are faring. So please add your pieces to make the jigsaw more complete.

Finally, don't assume that a sighting posted on social media will find its way to the Local Recorder, let alone into their database. It is unlikely that someone else will have the time to process your postings on Twitter, Facebook, blogs etc. If the record's worth tweeting about, it's worth putting on BirdTrack too!

Stuart Rivers (with input from Ian Andrews, Martin Cook and Graham Sparshott)

Ready to launch – the new SOC App

J. ALLISON

At the time of writing, the app working team (Jane Allison, Martin Cook and Alan Knox) are counting down to the launch of the new SOC mobile app - 'Where to Watch Birds in Scotland' - which is due to be available for download on 13 March 2019! Free to use and available for Android and Apple devices, the app will enable users to discover where to watch birds in Scotland and the species they might see.

This unique app (no digital resource like this currently exists) will bring Scotland's birds to a new generation of birdwatchers and will help members of the public, complete beginners and experts alike, to discover the best places to see and enjoy birds around the country. The app will reach people who would never seek out a printed birding book as well as serving the needs of experienced birders.

The project fulfils numerous constitutional aims of the SOC including promoting the study, enjoyment and conservation of wild birds and their habitats across Scotland.

It is also a wonderful advert for what (largely) volunteers working together can create - the app is the result of a collaboration of effort by the working team alongside Local Co-ordinators around the country, who assembled a number of Local Contributors in each region to write up handpicked birdwatching locations.

The app is expected to launch with details of around 250 individual birding sites across Scotland's recording areas. New sites will be added on an on-going basis and existing sites updated, as far as possible.

For each birdwatching site featured on the app, users will have access to the following information:

- directions to the site by public transport or car
- the best season(s) to visit
- the recording area the site falls within
- whether entry and/or parking charges apply at that location
- whether the location is a reserve or has any special designations
- how to birdwatch the site
- birds likely to be seen at that location
- unusual/rare species that have been recorded at the site
- other notable wildlife to look out for at that location
- recent sightings in the area (the app has an integrated recent sightings feed in from BirdTrack data)
- a means to submit bird sightings to the local bird recorder or to log in to BirdTrack
- being able to view their current location (assuming in Scotland)
- the option to search the app for information on a given species of bird (extracted from the Club's landmark publication, *The Birds of Scotland*) and to discover where these species are likely to be seen
- the option to save site accounts as favourites

Over and above the educational objectives of the project, the app should: encourage and facilitate the reporting of bird sightings to the local bird recorder and/or BirdTrack; promote the Club and local branches by directing traffic to the website; encourage signing up for SOC's e-communications and alert users when new sites have been uploaded to the app.

To download the app (from c. 13 March 2019) visit www.the-soc.org.uk/app

Jane Allison

The online Scottish Bird Report – an update

I.J. ANDREWS

It is now eight years since the digital version of the Scottish Bird Report was launched on the SOC website (Murray 2011). Since 2010, the project has grown considerably and the oSBR has become an immensely valuable resource for many people. Following Ray Murray's death in 2016, the project took a back seat as other projects needed to be finished. However, following much encouragement by those at the recent Scottish Recorders' meeting in July 2018, the project has now received a fresh input of reports. There are now 131,251 species entries available from 687 local bird reports.

As always, the database can be searched by species, year and recording area to provide an easily accessible route into the archives. So much is now instantly available to view on your computer, tablet or phone.

The BBRC rarities section provided by Keith Naylor has also been updated to include accepted records up to 2016.

From the outset, the oSBR has worked with local report editors so as not to affect report sales. For this reason, there is usually an agreed 2–3-year gap between report publication and the appearance on oSBR. But, remember that the printed report contains much more than just the systematic lists - so buy your local report regardless!

Some local bird reports are now (or soon will be) only available as pdf files (e.g. www.birdsinmorayandnairn.org/2011-onwards). The species accounts from these are also incorporated into oSBR.

We are looking at ways to improve the oSBR, so keep an eye on the website for exciting developments! The new web address is www.the-soc.org.uk/about-us/online-scottish-bird-report.

Acknowledgements

Thanks go to Stephen Hunter for dealing with all the website side of things, and to James Boyle for his help in the preparation of some reports for processing. Keith Naylor provided an update to the BBRC rarities data.

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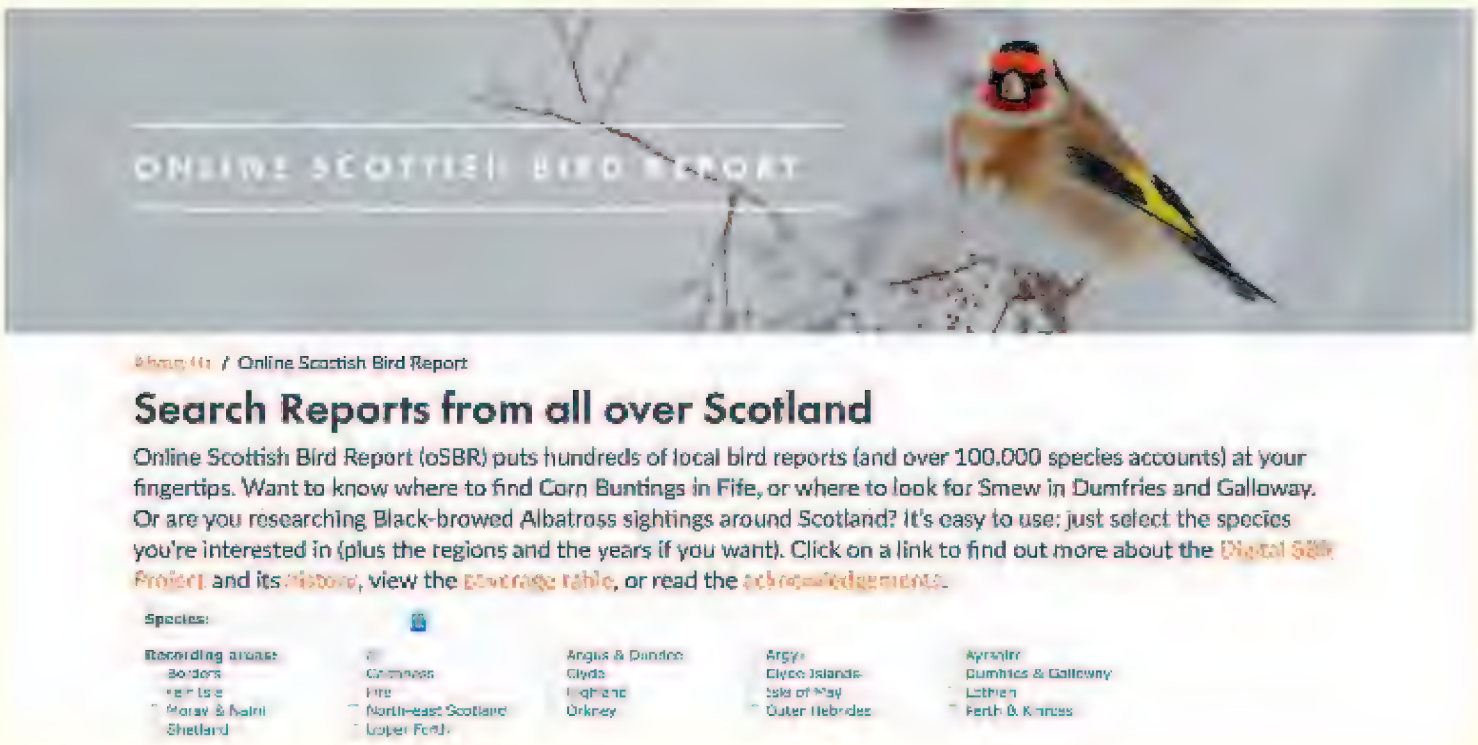
ONLINE SCOTTISH BIRD REPORT
/ Online Scottish Bird Report
Search Reports from all over Scotland
Online Scottish Bird Report (oSBR) puts hundreds of local bird reports (and over 100,000 species accounts) at your fingertips. Want to know where to find Corn Buntings in Fife, or where to look for Smew in Dumfries and Galloway. Or are you researching Black-browed Albatross sightings around Scotland? It's easy to use: just select the species you're interested in (plus the regions and the years if you want). Click on a link to find out more about the Digital SBR Project and its history, view the coverage table, or read the acknowledgements.
Species:
Recording areas:
Borders
Fife
Moray & Nairn
Shetland
Angus & Dundee
Clyde
Highland
Orkney
Argyll
Clyde Islands
Isle of May
Outer Hebrides
Ayrshire
Dumfries & Galloway
Lothian
Perth & Kinross

Plate 36. Screen-grab showing the *Online Scottish Bird Report* platform.

Plate 37. The first meeting of the young birders (pictured) and project facilitators at The Hidden Lane Tearoom in Glasgow, November 2018. © *Chloe Rossi*

Engaging Young Birders Project

J. ALLISON

How can SOC reach more young birders? How can we help you to develop? These were just two of the topics being brainstormed when a group of enthusiastic and inspiring youths kindly volunteered their time to meet with project facilitators Zul Bhatia, Kevin Sinclair (both Clyde Branch) and myself, late last year at The Hidden Lane Tearoom in Glasgow.

With the Young Birders' Training Course now firmly established and a growing number of students and juniors attending Conference, SOC is eager to build on these strong foundations and attract more young people to become involved in the Club's work and activities locally. Despite this promising upward trend however, it is fair to say that in general, this audience is under-represented at branch talks, outings and meetings. SOC is certainly not unique in this respect, with many clubs and societies facing the same challenge. However, the project facilitators (as above, but with the addition of Fiona Mclean, Clyde) are in the fortunate position of having established links with a number of dedicated and capable young birders, of varied ages and experience, having crossed paths through volunteering roles, internships or via their existing involvement with SOC.

Eleven of them were able to join us in late November 2018 for the first of the project's meetings. After a brief introduction to the Club, time was spent detailing the many ways SOC could help develop and upskill young birdwatchers, highlighting some of the existing opportunities available to them. The group was then encouraged to share feedback on why, for example, they rarely attended branch talks or outings. Following on from this discussion, they were asked 'What can SOC do to support you?'. A number of key themes emerged from this post-it based exercise, including: offering mentoring and networking opportunities, presentation slots at local branch meetings and conferences, research and survey training, as well as the chance to contribute to SOC publications. Plenty of food for thought in planning subsequent sessions! One broad

'want' from the group that consistently emerged throughout the evening, was the desire to interact with other like-minded individuals in an informal and friendly way. Thanks to the ease and simplicity of setting up social media accounts, this is one action point from the meeting that we can tick off as complete. In the days following the meeting, several attendees set up and 'launched' a new Facebook group called 'SOC Youth Connect'.

For any young birders looking to join the group, all you need to do is type 'SOC Youth Connect' into your Facebook search bar and request to join, subject to admin approval. We hope this will provide a platform for group members to organise attending local branch activities together, to share details of their own areas of expertise that fellow members might be able to benefit from and for facilitators to be able to share opportunities, job and volunteer positions that could be of interest.

It is hoped that what we learn from the 'Engaging Young Birders Project' in Clyde will have much wider application across the Club and branch network and we look for sharing the insights we glean in due course.

Jane Allison, Development Officer

British Birds Charitable Trust to provide travel assistance to Young Birders' Training Course training course participants in 2019

The Club and Isle of May Bird Observatory are pleased to announce that *British Birds* Charitable Trust have been in touch and will be able to offer assistance with the cost of travelling to Anstruther, Fife (the departure point for the Isle of May, where the course takes place) for participants attending the 2019 Young Birders' Training Course.

"The *British Birds* Charitable Trust is delighted to be associated with the SOC/Isle of May Bird Observatory 'Young Birders' Training Course'. We hope that by helping participants with the potentially prohibitive cost of travelling to the course, those young birders who've been put off applying may now be in a position to do so." **John Eyre, *British Birds* Charitable Trust**

In addition, participants will receive a free year's membership to the SOC, the latest *Isle of May Bird Report* and a year's free subscription to *British Birds*.

The Nature of Scotland award-nominated training course will take place on 6–13 July 2019. For more information and for how to apply, visit: www.the-soc.org.uk/get-involved/young-birders/young-birders-training-course

The *British Birds* Charitable Trust
Registered Charity No: 1089422

Plate 38. Brian Minshull with a Taiga Bean Goose caught for tagging purposes, Slammanan Plateau, October 2012. © *Brian Minshull*

More than just a talk

B. MINSHULL & K. COX

In February 2017, on one of my frequent visits to the Isle of May (IoM), one of my colleagues who is on the committee of the IoM Bird Observatory and Field Station Trust invited me to do a talk on the Slamannan Plateau Taiga Bean Geese for those attending the AGM of the Trust. As I often waffle on about the Bean Geese, he knows very well about my involvement with the birds.

The news that someone did a talk on the Slamannan Plateau Bean Geese was then quickly conveyed to Waterston House by another of my colleagues on my visits to the Isle of May, presumably using the communication channels only open to him as a former president of the Club.

As a result, I was contacted by Kathryn Cox in April 2017 and asked whether I would do the talk for the West Galloway, Dumfries and Lothian branches of the SOC during winter 2017/18. As I worked in Dumfries and Galloway for three years in the 1990s, a couple of days there certainly appealed and, living in Edinburgh as I do, I felt privileged to talk to my 'home' branch, especially as, unusually, the venue in this instance was Waterston House.

Certainly, from my point of view, these talks went well and, as such, I was very happy to again say yes when Kathryn contacted me and asked me whether I would do the talk for the Highland, Caithness and Orkney branches during winter 2018/19. Conveniently, part of the talk concerned the events revealed by tracking data during the spring migration in 2016 (as written up in *Scottish Birds* 37: 221–224). As some of the Taiga Bean Geese visited

Orkney, Caithness and Highland during this migration, the talk had real relevance. How could I refuse?

Again, from my perspective, these talks also went well (it is for others to say whether or not this was the case for my audiences!). However, the real purpose of this note is to very strongly encourage others to volunteer to speak on bird-related topics that they are knowledgeable on and can enthuse about.

Speakers are reimbursed for any travel expenses, and when possible, 'hosted' by a local member of the relevant branch (provided with overnight B&B and an evening meal).

I am more than aware that people have busy lives and as such it is hard to give up precious time. However, speaking to various SOC branches has been (for me) a wonderful experience. It has allowed me to get to places I rarely visit. For instance, I spent several days in Orkney at the back end of the autumn migration period in 2018 to finally try to do justice to Orkney having disgracefully only previously twitched it three times and passed through it once *en route* to Shetland; I certainly know Orkney and its birds much better now.

Without exception, meeting my hosts and also the many attendees of the talks has been very rewarding. We all share the same passion, whatever type of birdwatcher we are, and it is very gratifying to be part of the whole SOC 'kirk'. Stories about the endless inter-connections of people I have met - people I have previously heard all about, or formerly knew in entirely different contexts, etc., are way too numerous and complex to relate here. Suffice to say, it has been a very rich experience.

What's not to like about seeing and discussing the West Freugh flock of Greenland White-fronted Geese that I did some work on when working in Dumfries and Galloway in the 1990s, visiting Mersehead for the first time, having a half a day's free guided birding with my host in Caithness and a day's free guided birding with a local group stalwart in Orkney, meeting all those who work at HQ, and also the SOC President?

We are, it occurs to me, a huge extended family, bound together by our love of birds and membership of our own special Club, the SOC.

So, yes, if you have any similar 'story' to tell please do volunteer to contribute to the SOC Winter Talks Programme. You won't regret it.

Brian Minshull

Note from HQ

We would like to thank Brian for his positive feedback on taking part in our winter talks programme. If you are interested in giving a talk to any of our branches, here are a few pointers to the sort of subjects we are looking for (although the list is by no means exhaustive!):

- Bird topics but may include wider references to natural history
- Ideally Scottish subjects, or in some way related to Scotland e.g. migration
- Species accounts, for example if you have specialist knowledge of a particular species
- Latest research or projects, including PhD work
- Topical or other environmental issues (affecting birds)
- Long term monitoring schemes
- Accounts of specific nature reserves/sites
- Wildlife art

Talks tend to be between an hour and 1 hour 15 minutes long. As Brian notes, travel expenses (i.e. mileage and/or bus/train/ferry fares) will be reimbursed, and speakers are provided with an evening meal and B&B if required, usually with a branch committee member. HQ-organised talks are held in October, November, February and March (branches organise their own speakers for meetings outwith those months).

If you've been on a birding holiday abroad and are keen to show some of your photos, such a talk is well suited to a Members' Night, which many branches host. Please contact your branch secretary for further information.

If you think you might like to give a talk or have an idea you would like to discuss, please email me on admin@the-soc.org.uk. I look forward to hearing from you!

Kathryn Cox

Plate 39. Curlew, Aboyne, North-east Scotland, June 2012. © *Harry Scott*

Curlew countries gather at Waterston House to progress international plan

D. BROWN

In early September 2018, Waterston House provided the ideal setting for the convening of an International Working Group focussed on the conservation of the Curlew across its northern breeding range.

The looming crises facing the Curlew both here in the UK and across the global range has been well documented in recent years and the *AEWA International Single Species Action Plan for the Eurasian Curlew* was produced in 2015 to focus conservation effort and encourage collaboration. The purpose of the IWG is to help facilitate and support implementation of the action plan.

In total, 26 people attended the three-day workshop which was convened under the framework of the Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Waterbirds (or AEWA, for short) - an inter-governmental agreement focussed on conservation and cooperation across the flyway.

There was government, NGO and academic representation from the majority of countries that support the bulk of the global breeding population, with delegates attending from the UK, Ireland, France, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Estonia and Russia. Global NGOs also had a presence,

including Wetlands International, BirdLife International and the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation (FACE). The breadth of countries attending was a useful indication of the increasing importance, attention and focus being placed on Curlew conservation by governments across northern Europe.

Also present was the independent journalist Mary Colwell, who has gone to great lengths to raise awareness for the Curlew in recent years, through organising talks and workshops across the UK & Ireland and culminating in the release of her book, *Curlew Moon*, earlier this year. The keynote speech was delivered by Rachel Taylor from BTO, who provided an insight into her research work in Wales, where her team is using GPS devices to track Curlew movements and habitat preferences on during the breeding season.

Day two included a field trip to an Ayrshire farm to discuss and witness the threats facing Curlew populations in upland areas of Scotland: afforestation; farmland abandonment; the expansion of wind farms; and high predation pressure, resulting in part from landscape configuration and wider land management practices. We also showcased the trial management RSPB are undertaking on the farm as part of large-scale science project across the four UK countries.

Discussions on the final day focussed on an agreed workplan to take forward over the next 2–3 years and includes the following areas:

- The production of guidance on how to best undertake productivity monitoring for Curlew
- Using the above to undertake productivity monitoring at breeding sites across Northern Europe and Russia to better understand the breeding success in different of countries and regions
- Undertake an audit of historic and current satellite tagging and ringing studies, so as to better understand migratory connectivity between populations… then to produce recommendations on gaps in our knowledge of migration to inform where best to prioritise future migration studies
- Start up an Adaptive Harvest Management process to deal with the controversial issue of continued hunting of Curlew in France. France is the only country in Europe that continues to legally hunt Curlew, and the international plan called on a full moratorium whilst an Adaptive Harvest Management process is set up. An AHM process would collect demographic data for the Curlew populations wintering in France in order to see if any future harvest could ever occur on a sustainable basis in the future.
- Explore opportunities for cross-border funding to employ Curlew project officers in important breeding areas - to work with farmers, the public and other local stakeholders
- Write a guidance note on what Curlew needs are in the context of European Rural Development Schemes
- Support and promote International Curlew Day next year, which will take place on the 21st April 2019
- Undertake further research which uses GPS technology to better understand what habitats Curlew prefer at breeding sites; building on Rachel Taylor's work.
- Prioritise future research that seeks to develop and test landscape manipulation interventions that seek to reduce the currently high levels of predation pressure acting upon Curlew nests and chicks i.e. by manipulating landscape configuration
- Write up a summary of all the proposals and speak to external funders... so if anyone knows of bodies or individuals that might be interested in supporting some of these activities then please get in touch.

The event at Waterston House was organised by RSPB and hosted by the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) with additional support by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation and Nuclear Safety (BMU).

For more information please contact
Daniel Brown, Senior Conservation Advisor,
RSPB Scotland.
Email: Daniel.Brown@rspb.org.uk
Direct dial on: 0131 317 4145

Plate 40. Mountain Hare, Morven, North-east Scotland, January 2012. © *Ian Francis*

Mountain Hare declines – a reflection from North-east Scotland

I. FRANCIS

There has been much recent publicity about the decline of Mountain Hares in Scotland - particularly in the north-east and central Highlands. Anecdotal evidence from naturalists, witnessed incidents of large-scale culls posted on social media and other recent reports (e.g. OneKind 2017) have been given further substance in a recent peer-reviewed scientific paper by Adam Watson and Jerry Wilson, SOC vice-president (Watson & Wilson 2018). This showed clearly that the hares had declined both in the long-term, principally due to habitat loss (mostly afforestation of open moorlands and grasslands) and sharply in the more recent past, with declines most rapid on moorlands intensively managed for driven grouse shooting. Although the shooting industry disputed the conclusions through several press statements, there is a growing realisation that in parts of Scotland's moorlands, Mountain Hares are far less numerous than they once were and are often well below the apparent carrying capacity of the habitat.

There is, however, consensus that counting the hares to establish absolute densities is difficult, and this led to a recent project commissioned by Scottish Natural Heritage (Newey *et al.* 2018), which aimed to develop a simple counting method able to estimate hare densities. This might allow a better idea of whether a 'sustainable' cull is possible, assuming that the current situation, where Mountain Hares can legally be killed during an open season, continues to be the case. These animals have long been shot for field sports on upland estates and for protection of growing trees, though recently there has been increasing emphasis on culling hares on grouse moors, ostensibly to reduce tick burdens on grouse, since Mountain Hares are one of the hosts for ticks along with other upland mammals such as deer and sheep. Ticks carry a viral disease, louping ill, which adversely affects grouse, though it is not clearly demonstrated that killing hares benefits grouse shooting bags (Watson & Wilson 2018).

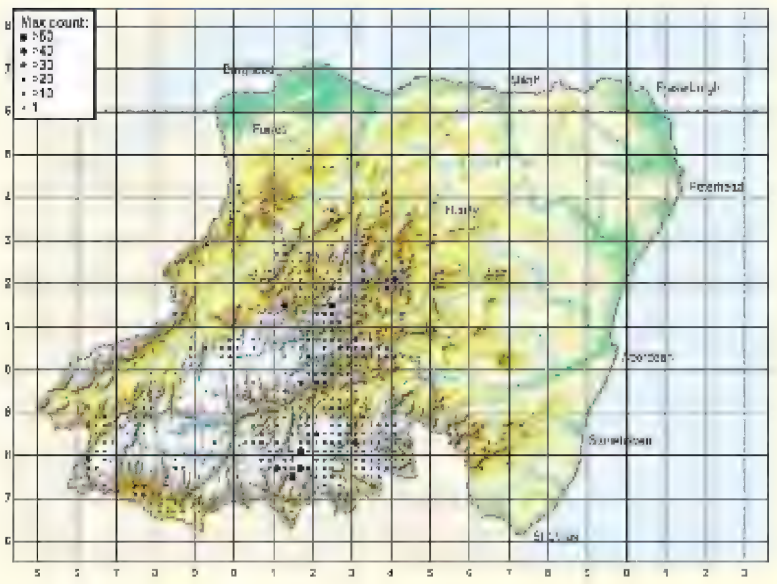

Figure 1. Mountain Hare distribution and maximum counts per tetrad, north-east Scotland, 2001–15. Note: coverage of every tetrad was not complete and this map was not included in the published atlas (Littlewood *et al*. 2017).

It is claimed by the shooting industry that grouse moorland management, which provides habitat and food through rotational heather burning, benefits Mountain Hares and certainly they are strongly associated with heather moorland in Scotland (Watson & Hewson 1973). Records supplied to a recent local mammal atlas of north-east Scotland (Littlewood *et al.* 2017) illustrate how maximum counts in tetrads varied across the uplands of that area (Figure 1). The highest counts submitted came from areas characterised by two influences - underlying base-rich geology and grouse moorland management. The highest densities of all can be found where those two factors coincide, and in north-east Scotland these can typically reach 30–69 hares/km^2, and may even rise as high as 200/km^2 (G. Iason & S. Newey in Littlewood *et al*. 2018).

Due to possible variation in recording effort, the mammal atlas records (c.1,800) cannot easily be used to quantify accurately any decline over time, but it is of interest that the average counts of all records per year decreased from around 6–8 in c.2002 to around 2–3 in c.2014. This may support notions of recent decline. Other than the work by Watson & Wilson, there are few other dedicated objective sources for Scotland, but mammal monitoring associated with the BTO Breeding Bird Survey (Harris *et al*. 2018, Massimino *et al*. 2018) shows a 37% decline in the abundance of Mountain Hares recorded in BBS squares between 1996–2016 for the whole UK and an abundance decline of more than 50% within a significant part of its core Scottish range. Indeed, Massimino *et al*. note "For mountain hare we find a large area characterised

Plate 41. Mountain Hare, Glen Ey, North-east Scotland, April 2018. © *Ian Francis*

Plate 42. Mountain Hare road casualty, Bridge of Brown, Moray & Nairn, December 2018. © *Ian Francis*

by severe abundance declines, indicating an emerging conservation issue for this species." By contrast, the national game bag records from shooting estates (Aebischer *et al*. 2011) show variable and cyclic patterns with few clear long-term trends, though culling effort may influence this. Anecdotally, in North-east Scotland, it is apparent that trends in numbers of road casualty Mountain Hares over the last 10–15 years on the main upland trunk roads vary between different areas (pers. obs.). They have declined substantially on the A939 Lecht road which traverses driven grouse moors where culls have been witnessed, but conversely there has been no such decline apparent on the main A93 Glen Shee road which passes through moorland managed more for deer stalking; indeed, carcase counts have shown a slight increase here in the last five years (M. Marquiss, pers. comm.).

Why is the recent decline of Mountain Hares on grouse moors in North-east Scotland of interest to ornithologists? There are two main concerns. One relates to the fact to this species is a major component of Golden Eagle diet as well as prey for some other raptors such as Hen Harriers. Along with Red Grouse, Mountain Hares are the main food provided for eagle nestlings in eastern Scotland - over one-third (by number) of prey items analysed during 2007–17 (E. Weston, pers. comm.). Although some prey switching could occur, if hare numbers reduce,

Plate 43. Mountain Hare, Glen Muick, North-east Scotland, January 2016. © *Ian Francis*

this will certainly not help the need to maintain and indeed boost nest productivity in an area known to be grossly under-occupied and in unfavourable status for eagles (Whitfield *et al.* 2008). This then links to the second concern. The intensive culling of hares on moorlands is one of many measures taken by shooting managers to boost Red Grouse numbers and is indicative of a suite of management activities on some Scottish grouse estates which are of growing concern to many. Clearly these activities do extend to the killing of eagles and other raptors in some areas, as evidenced clearly by the recent study of the fates of satellite-tagged young eagles (Whitfield & Fielding 2017).

There are other wider points. One is that we all enjoy seeing these attractive upland mammals (our only native lagomorph), and though other factors may also influence their numbers, we need to be confident that they are not being 'managed away' in front of our very eyes. It may well be acceptable ecologically for some shooting to a certain 'sustainable' level to take place, even if the ethics of this are not acceptable to all. It may indeed be necessary to cull hares to allow woodland establishment, a widely shared objective. But culling to permit artificially high densities of Red Grouse for leisure shooting is another matter. If large culls are taking place in the main centre of their Scottish and UK populations, then this activity will have a detrimental impact on their UK status. This may be contrary to current national and European wildlife law, and may also be affecting other species of conservation concern. It will be interesting to see if the soon to be published review of grouse moorland management in Scotland (Scottish Government 2018) makes recommendations that get to the heart of dealing with these Mountain Hare declines.

Acknowledgements

I thank Mick Marquiss, Ewan Weston, Nick Littlewood and Jerry Wilson for comments.

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Ian Francis, RSPB East Scotland Office, 10 Albyn Terrace, Aberdeen AB10 1YP. Email: Ian.francis@rspb.org.uk

Aggressive behaviour again in Black-throated Divers

S. SYKES

Having read the account in 2015 by Michael Crutch in *Scottish Birds* 34(3) of the aggressive action of a female Black-throated Diver toward Mallard ducklings at a Speyside loch, it was interesting for me to see similar behaviour there again this year in late July.

Normally, the Mallards inhabit the shallow eastern end of the loch and the pair of Black-throated Divers are most often to be seen in the deeper waters in the middle and at the far side. On this particular occasion, a fisherman approached the near bank at the western end of the loch, putting up a female Mallard and a brood of four very young ducklings, which were, unusually and, as it turned out, most ill-advisedly, under the bank at that end. As I watched from the road, it at first appeared to me that the ducks had scuttled straight over the underwater path of the diver. But, as one duckling disappeared completely and the Mallard flew up in alarm, I realised that something much more serious was happening. The diver then plunged, dived and plunged again as it raced across the water after the ducklings, pursuing each one individually, until it had caught and drowned them all, leaving three tiny bodies bobbing on the surface of the loch. Unlike the previous occasion, the female Mallard made no attempt to harass the diver after its attack and flew off.

I knew that divers can have a more varied diet than is often supposed and would not have been overly surprised had this bird taken a small amphibian. Or was this not a feeding attack but a territorial one? The diver was alone, its young were almost fully grown and were nowhere in sight, and the nest site was the other side of the loch.

Sue Sykes, Grantown-on-Spey

Plate 44. The Coconut with feeding Blue Tit, May 2016. © *Joan Howie*

Unusual roost site

J. HOWIE

During a hot dry spell in the summer of 2017, I noticed for several evenings just before dusk, a juvenile Blue Tit sitting on top of the coconut shell hanging from my bird table in New Galloway, Dumfries & Galloway. It kept looking about it for a short while and I presumed it was going to roost in the laurels behind the bird table but did not wait to see if it did so.

Then one evening, I watched the bird for longer while it sat on top of the shell and eventually about 21:20 hrs I saw it go inside. I watched until dark and never saw it come out.

A few hours later, when there was total darkness, I went out with a torch and looked inside. I could not make out where the head or tail was but just saw a bundle of feathers gently moving as the bird breathed. The bird roosted in the shell for seven nights from the 20 to 26 June.

Unfortunately, during the night of 26th it rained and in the morning the inside of the shell was very wet and the young bird never roosted there again.

Joan Howie, New Galloway

Plate 45 a–c. Sparrowhawk, Motherwell, Clyde, 14 September 2017 © *Alison Guthrie*

A successful killing technique

J. MAXWELL

The following sequence of videograbs illustrates the particular attack and kill pattern of a local Sparrowhawk in a garden in Motherwell, Clyde. Seed and nut feeders there have been attracting many small birds, especially Goldfinches.

Plate 45 a. The Sparrowhawk comes racing in heading for the central domed seed feeder, where we can just make out a Goldfinch feeding behind the protective wires.

Plate 45 b. The hawk brakes behind the feeder and feet forward, grabs the Goldfinch through the wires. Using his own weight, the hawk's feet pull the Goldfinch down the wires to the feeder floor.

Plate 45 c. Still gripping wire and Goldfinch, the Sparrowhawk lets itself dangle upside down underneath by the talons of one foot.

This position, hanging down with wings out for balance, has been observed lasting up to 10 minutes. Occasionally, the hawk flaps up to extricate the bird and then falls back to the inverted hanging position to recover from its exertions. Eventually, the Goldfinch, caught and constricted against the feeder's floor and wire by the hawk's weight, expires. The Sparrowhawk then flutters up, extricates the dead bird and flies off.

This same hunting technique has been witnessed several times by the house owner. It is generally thought that this model of domed feeder with protective wiring makes it safe for small birds to feed. Like squirrels however, Sparrowhawks have obviously developed ingenious strategies to obtain food and feeder designers will need to work out other solutions to level the field for our smaller garden birds.

Jimmy Maxwell

BOOK REVIEWS

Common & Spotted Sandpipers. Phil Holland, 2018. Whittles Publishing, ISBN 978-1-84995-361-0, softback, 168 pages, £18.99.

In Appendix 1, the author states of this marvelous book that it "has no reference to statistical tests, as it is written for people who are interested in bird behaviour" - this should endear both him and his book to a very wide readership indeed! But for those who seek out statistics, there are eight pages of references to whet their appetites.

The book is a wonderful distillation of over 40 years of amateur research by the author, largely in collaboration with the late Derek Yalden, based on studies of the Common Sandpiper in the breeding season in the Peak District. However, there are diversions northwards to the Scottish Borders and Highlands to investigate comparative breeding studies there; with excursions further afield, following Common Sandpipers on their migrations to and from their winter quarters, recently revealed in pioneering work by Highland Ringing Group.

These life stages of the basically monogamous Common Sandpiper are compared and contrasted with those of the serially polyandrous congener the Spotted Sandpiper across the Atlantic. Much of this fascinating information will be new to general UK birders.

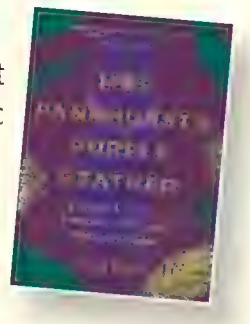
The main text of the book finishes off with discussion of the two species' evolutionary histories, and what the future holds for them, followed by three appendices of study areas, food items and biometrics.

Throughout, there are clear and concise tables and maps, and many well-chosen images of both species - I particularly like the one on page 23 of a Common Sandpiper chick running off to hide.

The author's style here is relaxed and reveals a true affection for his study species and their habitats - he has produced a great addition to all birdwatchers' libraries, amateur and professional alike.

Tom Dougall

Mrs Pankhurst's Purple Feather: fashion, fury and feminism - women's fight for change. Tessa Boase, 2018. Aurum Press, ISBN 978-1-78131-654-2, hardback, 320 pages, £20.00.



This is an account of two heroic women who changed British culture. One of them was addicted to fashion, flaunting hats piled high with dead birds and aigrettes. The other was hostile to the suffrage movement, but dedicated to ending cruelty to wildlife. Both campaigned for decades. Mrs Pankhurst won votes for women in 1918. Mrs Lemon co-founded the RSPB, and achieved the passing of the Plumage Bill by Parliament in 1921. By then, she had also set up a network of 'watchers' at key breeding sites from Orkney and Shetland to the Norfolk Broads.

Etta Lemon was sickened by a trade which left chicks to starve in the nest and threatened extinction for the world's most colourful species. She first took action in her teens, writing to women in her church who wore bird-bedecked hats. In the 1880s, ladies did not normally preach, or speak out in public, but Etta's father was an evangelist who taught her how to voice her convictions; 'Begin low, Proceed slow, Mount higher, Take fire, Then expire.'

Tessa Boase is a journalist who likes a good story and knows how to tell one. Anyone now fighting for change, perhaps with regard to our addiction to plastics, or fossil fuels, will find inspiring parallels.

Barbara Mearns

How to be an Urban Birder. David Lindo, 2018. Princeton University Press, ISBN 978-0-691-17962-9, 232 pages, paperback, £14.99.

"Urban birding is fast becoming ornithology's new rock 'n' roll. Birds and birding have never been cooler - and urban birding is at the cutting edge". If sentences like these - as on the back of the book - make you cringe, then probably avoid. If you already have a list, if you have a local patch and you already know that Princes Street in Edinburgh is a top place to see Sparrowhawk or a Peregrine, then also avoid. But if you are new to birding and live in an urban area (and most of us do), then this has a lot to offer.

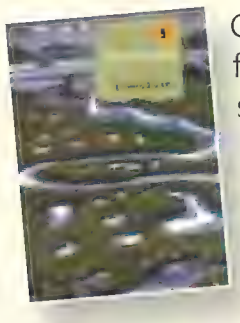
How to be an Urban Birder is basically an up-to-date take on the book that helped us all get into birding at some point in our early birding lives, whether that was *How to Watch Birds* by John Gooders in 1975, or the classic *Bill Oddie's Little Black Bird Book* a decade later. Like its

predecessors, this book is a guide to how to find, identify and understand birds: field or 'street' craft, kit and knowledge. But unlike many of its predecessors, it is less about the oddness and exclusivity of being a birder and more about birding as an accessible and enjoyable hobby that anyone can dip into. The central message is that there is a world of interest and joy on our doorsteps, even in middle of London or Glasgow, if you just start looking. And this is certainly a message we need more than ever.

If you are reading this review as an SOC member you won't be buying this book for yourself, but maybe you have a pre- or early teen niece or nephew, or grandchild, for whom this might just be the catalyst that changes their life.

Will Cresswell

Saltmarsh. Clive Chatters, 2017. Bloomsbury, London, ISBN 9781472933591, hardback, 384 pages, 260 colour photos, £35.



Collecting this book from Waterston House, saltmarsh was visible from the window, and I looked forward to learning more about a habitat that can appear unattractive to some but is recognised by naturalists as exceptionally dynamic and interesting.

Clive Chatters displays a very wide range of knowledge, having worked for over 35 years in conservation on or near the coastline of the south of England. There are 21 well-illustrated chapters; chapter 4 looks at the Scottish Highlands mainly on the west coast, but also Loch Fleet; chapter 5 covers the Atlantic gateway, i.e. the Outer Hebrides; chapter 6 the Merse lands of the Solway. The next chapters cover Welsh and English sites. Then nine chapters discuss aspects of conservation in considerable detail.

The author seems to be a botanist - and a knowledgeable one - but does range much more widely. The book is not so strong on invertebrates or energy flows within ecosystems. I do feel that most ornithologists would query whether it is sensible to consider saltmarsh separately from adjacent mud and sand. It can work with plants but birds move between habitats with the moving tide; perhaps taking the whole estuary as an ecological unit would be preferable? Saltmarsh is taken to be wherever salt spray reaches, so cliffs and clifftops are included, as well as inland sites in England. The spread of halophytes - salt tolerant coastal plants - along the motorway network is covered. He points out that saltmarsh is one of the most threatened habitats in the British Isles with a total area smaller than lowland heath or sand dunes.

The book is very good on the evolution of the conservation movement. Local nature reserves are discussed but there is no mention of Aberlady Bay which was the first in Britain in 1952. This is a good book but can you adequately describe saltmarshes in this country with barely a mention of the Firths of Forth or Tay?

Stan da Prato

Woodpeckers. Gerard Gorman, 2018. RSPB Spotlight, Bloomsbury Wildlife, ISBN 978-1-4729-5118-2, paperback, 128 pages, £9.99.

This slim paperback gives a fascinating insight into the lives of woodpeckers. It of course concentrates on the four British species, but cleverly introduces a variety of other species from many parts of the world. It is split into a dozen chapters, concentrating on many aspects of the lives of these widely enjoyed birds, ranging over their descriptions, their behaviour, even their places in culture the world over. The book covers a great deal of depth about these popular birds, but is very easy to read, and can be dipped into as the reader's specific interests dictate. And it has a superb collection of photos, again covering many species in addition to our British ones, and depicting every aspect of plumage, foraging and nesting techniques, and general behaviour. I must mention the amazing photograph of a Green Woodpecker taking to flight with a Weasel on its back - I can well understand how that photo 'went viral'!

I found this a very attractive, useful book, and one that would happily have a place in my birding library.

Mike Betts

Birds of Spain. Eduardo de Juana & Juan M. Varela (translated by Ernest Garcia), 2017. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, ISBN 978-84-16728-02-2, hardback, 258 pages, €25 (approx. £25).

This slim volume is a translation of a successful Spanish field guide covering Spain and its islands, although the maps also show distribution in adjacent territories. Taxonomy matches the Birdlife International order but not the latest IOC listing.

Brief descriptions of family groups are followed by succinct species accounts. These give salient identification points plus distribution maps, habitat and status. Appropriate subspecies are mentioned. Opposite the accounts are the

illustrations, which show plumages relevant to the region. Extra plates are added for complex groups such as gulls, raptors and waders. The 567 species described include a list of selectively illustrated rarities followed by a bibliography, indexes and other useful information. The lead author and translator are well-known as the authors of the comprehensive *The Birds of the Iberian Peninsula,* and must be congratulated on an attractive English edition of this field guide.

On the whole the illustrations are excellent, but size comparison is not possible on most plates. Colour is not always true with the oranges and reds often too intense in my copy. However, for a 500 g pocket-sized guide (21 cm x 13 cm) such as this, aimed at the general birdwatcher, I would certainly recommend it for that trip to Spain.

Norman Elkins

Birds New to Science: fifty years of avian discoveries. David Brewer, 2018. Christopher Helm, London, ISBN 978-1-4729-0628-1, hardback, 416 pages, £45.

This book is mostly about the 288 species of birds that have been newly described worldwide between 1960 and 2015 - not including previously described subspecies that have been elevated to species level. Introductory pages include sections on the concept of species and a historical background of the description of the world's birds. The account for each species includes a short description, details of the discovery, biology, known range, conservation status and etymology of the scientific and vernacular name. I particularly enjoyed the accounts of how each species was actually discovered, with some particularly striking species such as Araripe Manakin being found almost by accident, while others resulted from careful detective work.

Some 50 'future new species' are briefly described; most of these are birds that have been seen (often regularly) by birdwatchers, but had yet to be formally described by 2015. Sixty-five 'invalid' species are also listed - these are those described species that have subsequently been considered not to be valid; of course, future evidence may reverse some of these decisions.

I recommend this book to world birders who want an entertaining and interesting background to new species, and to those who may think that we have described all the bird species of the world.

Mark Tasker

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RINGERS' ROUNDUP

If you have any interesting ringing recoveries, articles, wee stories, project updates or requests for information which you would like to be included in the next issue, please email to Raymond Duncan at rduncan393@outlook.com. Thank you very much to the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) and the many ringers, ringing groups and birders who provided the information for this latest round up. Thanks also to the many bird watchers who take the time and trouble to read rings in the field or find dead ringed birds and report them.

For lots more exciting facts, figures, numbers and movements log on to www.bto.org/volunteer-surveys/ringing/publications/online-ringing-reports.

Owls

A short talk by Neil Morrison of Tay Ringing Group and John Calladine from the BTO at the 2017 Scottish Ringers' Conference on the satellite tracking and intensive work they had been carrying out on owls in Perthshire inspired Ewan and Jenny Weston from Grampian Ringing Group to give the tape luring a go. A few nights later and their first attempt was rewarded with a young male Barn Owl at Balmedie, near Aberdeen. Building on this initial success a total of 15 Barn Owls, 11 Long-eared Owls, three Short-eared Owls and one Tawny Owl have been captured in the winters of 2017/18 and 2018/19. On five sessions in the same net ride in a rough field of 'species-rich grassland' created by farmer John Mitchell by the River Ythan, eight Barn Owls, three Long-eared Owls and two Short-eared Owls have been ringed.

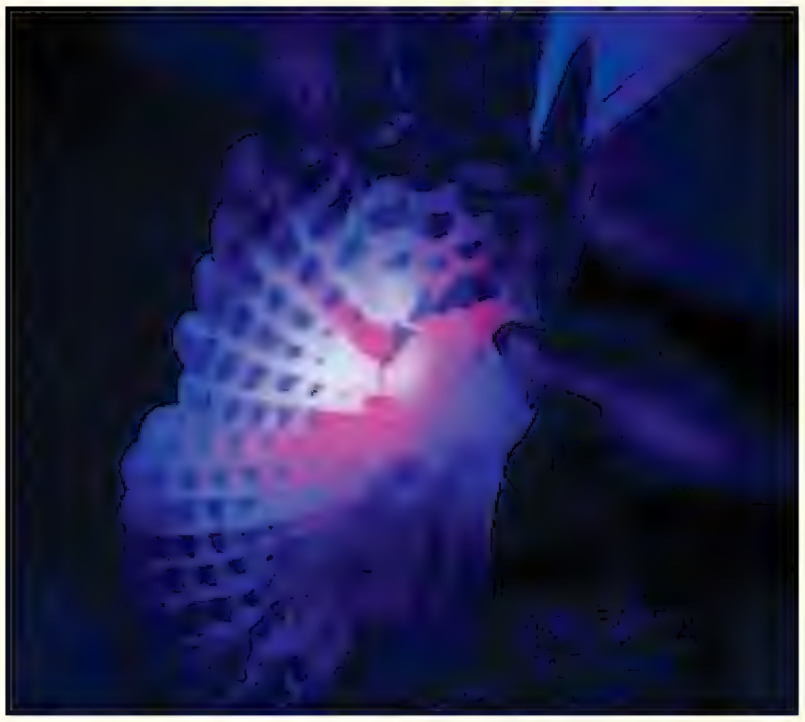

Plate 46. In this juvenile Tawny Owl viewed under ultra-violet light, the porphyrin in new feathers fluoresces pink. © *Jenny Weston*

One of the easiest techniques to age owls relies on porphyrins, a large group of pigments found in feathers (as well as a variety of other tissues) that degrade when exposed to sunlight. As owls are nocturnal the porphyrins in the feathers gradually degrade and the porphyrin in new feathers fluoresces pink under ultra-violet light, allowing old and new feathers to be identified (Plate 46). Our resident owl species (Barn and Tawny) moult progressively over three or four years, whereas Long- and Short-eared Owls do an almost complete moult of their flight feathers every year. This ringing has shown that there is a sizeable population of owls wintering in North-east Scotland.

Unfortunately, owls face a variety of threats, the main one being collisions with motor vehicles. Locally in Aberdeenshire, at least 10 Barn Owls have been found dead in five months since the opening of the A90 dual carriageway between Bridge of Don, Aberdeen and Ellon in September 2018. This navigational nightmare for them has gone from a two-lane 50 mph crawl to a four-lane 70 mph speedway. A juvenile found dead on 29 September had been ringed as a chick on Cawdor Estate in the Findhorn Valley on 10 July 2018, 112 km to the NW. It was bad enough having to hope that only daft juveniles were the victims but alas the most recent casualty picked up was ring number GV29570 - the first Barn Owl ringed by Ewan and Jenny after the conference, at Balmedie on 19 November 2017. At now over a year old it would appear that it is not only the recently fledged wandering juvenile birds which are vulnerable to the speeding traffic.

Sedge Warblers

What a difference a nice summer makes! Figure 1 shows some autumn recaptures of juvenile Sedge Warblers ringed between late July and mid-September 2018 in the River Ythan reedbeds in North-east Scotland.

Our returns in previous autumns with comparable numbers ringed have usually only been one or two at best. A combination of a slower and more relaxed migration due to the prolonged fine weather or more ringers getting out more often to ring more birds? Only a small proportion of Sedge Warblers appear to fatten up in our reedbeds but southern England and northern France and Belgium are clearly very important staging and fattening areas.

A previously ringed breeding adult Sedge Warbler caught at Meikle Loch near the Ythan reedbeds on 10 May 2016 weighed a pretty normal 11.1 g. Details were received back from the BTO showing it had been ringed the previous autumn on 24 August 2015 as a juvenile at Squire's Down, Dorset. The recovery slip showed it weighed a whopping 19 g, with the ringer, T. Squire, emphasising in a foot note in capital letters that this was indeed correct.

The only disappointment in autumn 2018 was the lack of a recapture by ringer T. Squire from Squire's Down in Dorset. Anybody who rings Sedge Warblers on a regular basis in Scotland will have had an exchange with this site. Perhaps there's a story there for a future ringing roundup?

Figure 1. Recapture locations of Sedge Warblers ringed at the Ythan reedbed in autumn 2018.

Highland Black-headed Gulls - east, west or south?

Talking of a nice summer, not all species benefitted from the exceptionally warm and dry conditions of 2018. Visits to ring Common and Black-headed Gull chicks at colonies in North-east Scotland revealed quite a lot of mortality of young right up to fledging age. Lack of worms due to the prolonged dry weather was believed to be the main cause.

Only one out of 100 Common Gull chicks ringed at an upland colony in Donside regurgitated food where normally a fair spattering of disgorged worms on clothing is expected. Many chicks felt underweight so only metal rings were applied (without an engraved colour ring) and the visit cut short. Similarly, with Black-headed Gull chicks at Forvie, though, being at the coast, they had more of a choice of food. One chick regurgitated a 12 cm Eel.

Some free lunches in Brian Bate's garden in Grantown on Spey in the Central Highlands were a welcome opportunity for Black-headed Gulls feeding their chicks and 20 adults were metal ringed in June 2018. Four of these birds have since been resighted further south in winter (Figure 2). Two headed south-west to Glasgow, one headed south to Linlithgow in West Lothian and the fourth headed east to Aberdeen.

Thanks to observers Gavin Baptie, Scott Wotherspoon and Logan Johnson for taking the trouble to read, record and report these ringed birds.

Figure 2. Recapture locations of Black-headed Gulls ringed at Granton on Spey in June 2018.

Logan had a very successful trip along the River Dee in Aberdeen that day, also managing to read a white engraved darvic ring 'A670' on a bird ringed in Germany on 22 March 2013 and a yellow ring '2VJC' on a bird ringed more locally as a chick in the Forvie colony, 15 km up the coast, in 2014.

Twite - colour-ringed sightings wanted

Previous ringing and colour-ringing studies have helped to unravel some of the movements of Twite within and between Scotland, England and Ireland. It continues to decline across Britain and Ireland and is a Red-listed bird of conservation concern.

On the east coast of Scotland (Newburgh and Montrose), wintering numbers have fluctuated considerably over the years and although the flocks of 200–300 seem to have long gone, numbers have taken a slight turn for the better again recently. Birds are still being colour-ringed at Montrose Basin (see Ringers' Roundup *Scottish Birds* 38(3)) with 215 ringed in winter 2017/18 and a further 50 so far this winter at time of writing mid-January. Birds are also being colour-ringed at the RSPB Oa reserve on Islay (a single black ring with white letters).

The west-east coast winter movement connection continues. A bird caught at Newburgh on 6 January 2019 had been ringed the previous spring on 7 May 2018 at Clachtoll on the west coast of Sutherland. Interestingly, a bird ringed on Islay on 3 December 2017 was also retrapped at Clachtoll in spring on 27 April 2018. A bird caught at Montrose on 8 December 2018 had also been ringed the previous spring on the west coast on 21 April 2018 at Morar, Mallaig while a bird ringed on 9 February 2018 at Montrose was retrapped at Achiltibuie on 23 April 2018. Two colour-ringed birds from Montrose were resighted on the Isle of Skye in May 2018.

Plate 47. A 'hot pink' colour-ringed Twite, Montrose Basin, Angus & Dundee, winter 2018/19. © *Ron Mitchell*

So, can colour-ringing help us find out why the Twite is in decline and why numbers fluctuate from winter to winter? Please check any Twite you see for colour rings. Any other observations such as flock size and habitat, what they might be feeding on and if potentially breeding or not would also be very useful.

Please send any sightings of **metal over yellow right leg and two colours left leg** to: Ben Herschell (benherschell@hotmail.com) or Raymond Duncan (rduncan393@outlook.com), and any sightings of **black rings with white letters** should be sent to: Jamie Dunning (jamiedunning8@googlemail.com) or David Wood (david.wood@rspb.org.uk).

Waxwings

Hopes were high for a good Waxwing winter after a bit of an influx in November and flocks of up to 150+ being reported around North-east Scotland but it was short lived. Twenty-three were colour-ringed in Aberdeen before numbers suddenly plummeted. Colour ring sightings helped track their movements a bit with a mostly east coast journey (Figure 3).

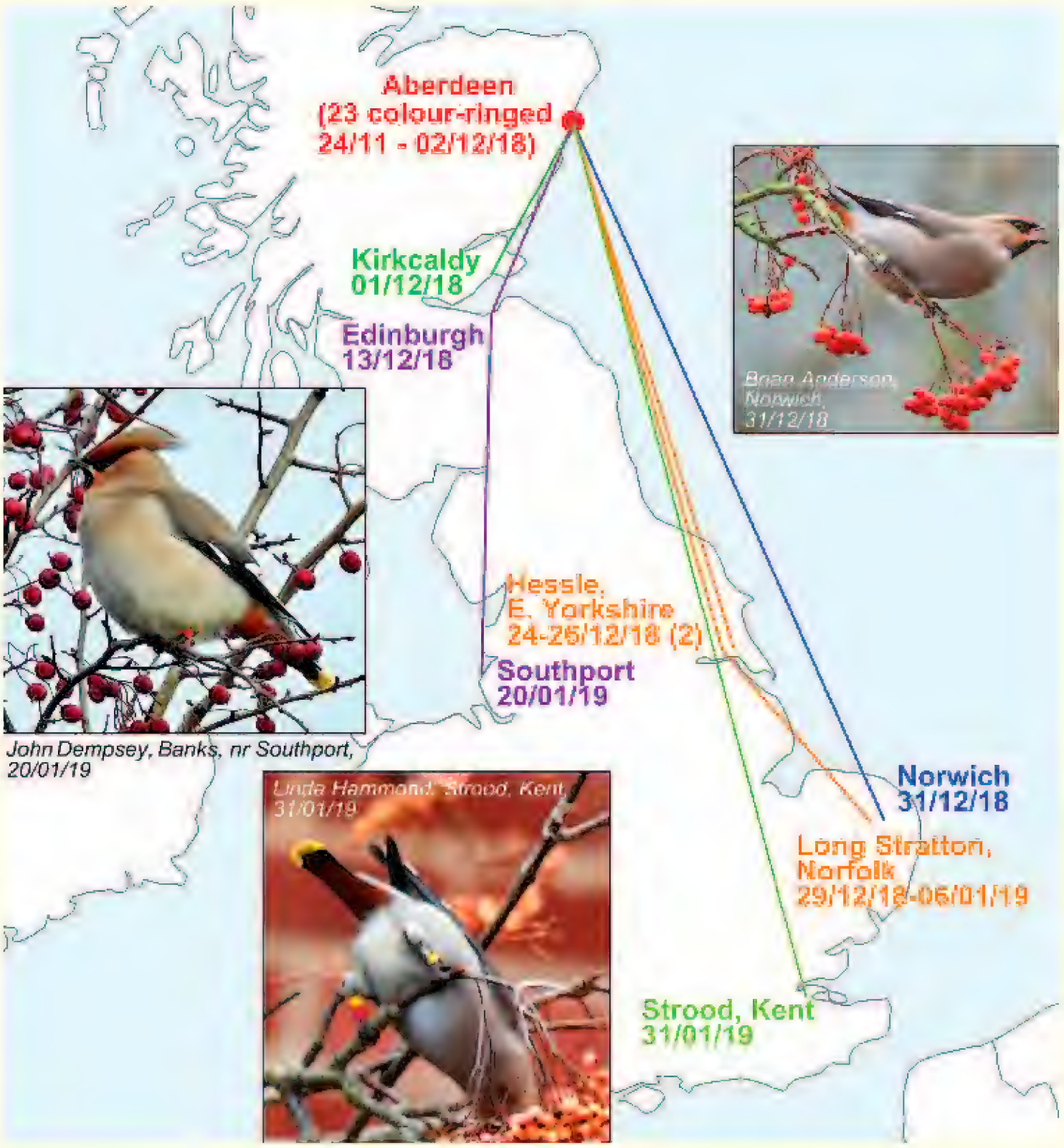

Figure 3. Colour-ring sightings of Waxwings ringed in Aberdeen, North-east Scotland, 24 November and 2 December 2018.

Thanks to Dave Okill for the following peerie (wee/small) Shetland ringing roundup:

Pacific Red-necked Phalaropes

Supported financially and logistically by the RSPB, nine adult Red-necked Phalaropes were fitted with geolocator tags in summer 2012, at the reserve on Fetlar, Shetland. One bird was successfully retrapped in summer 2013 and the data retrieved from the tag. This bird had left Fetlar on 1 August 2012, travelling south of Iceland and Greenland it had crossed the Atlantic to coastal Labrador in six days. It moved south through the St Laurence and Bay of Fundy, where many phalaropes gather, by 13 August; it then travelled down the east coast of America and was off Florida by September. It crossed the Gulf of Mexico and into the Pacific Ocean by mid-October. Wintering at sea, off the east Galapagos, Ecuador and Peru. It started its spring migration at the end of April crossing to the Caribbean over Panama. By 20 May, it was off Nova Scotia and then headed out into the Atlantic, where the geolocator battery stopped before it got back to Fetlar. This is the first time any migrant bird from Europe has been shown to migrate to the Pacific.

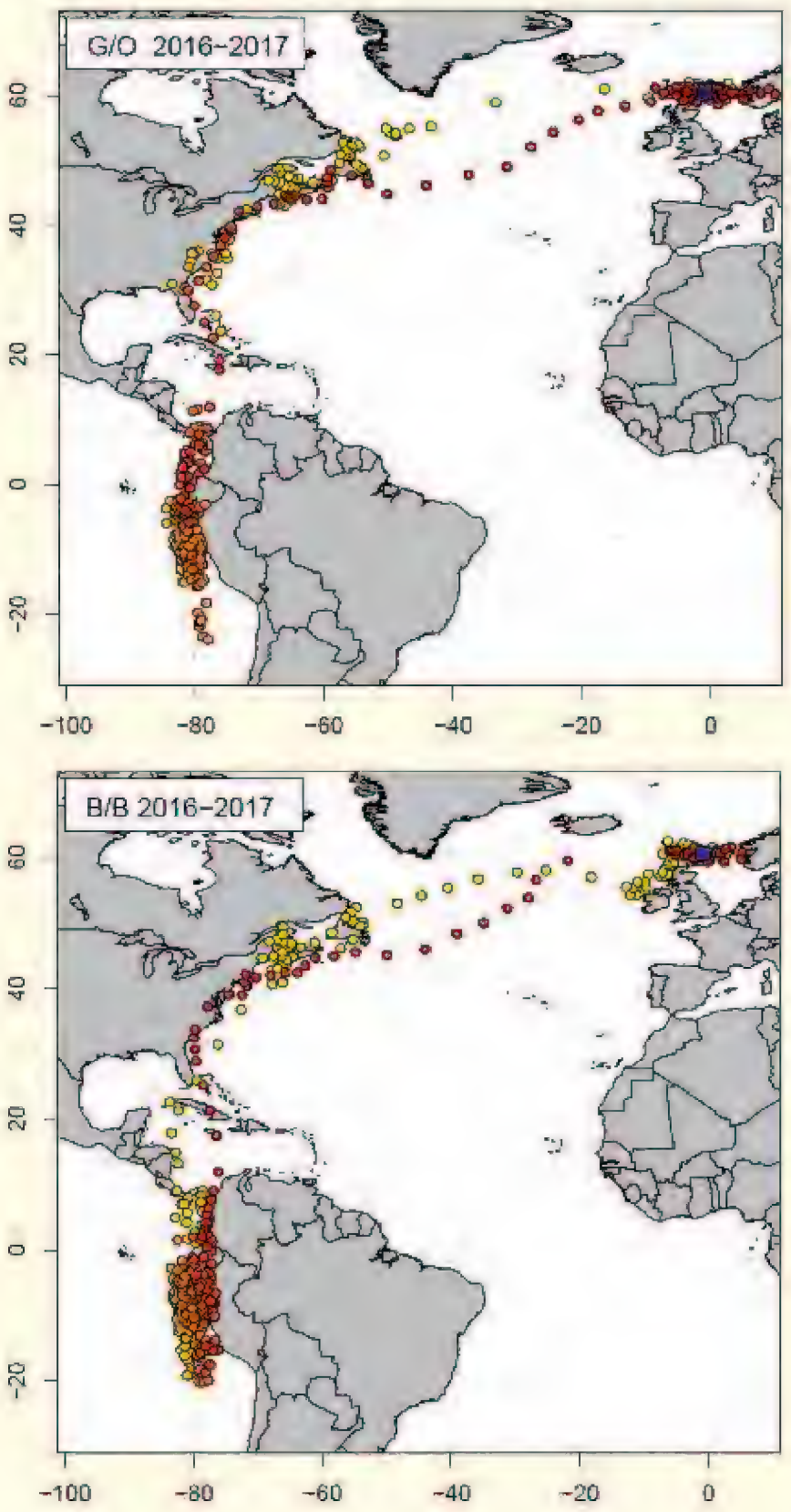

Figure 4. Movements in 2016/17 of two male Red-necked Phalaropes breeding on Fetlar, Shetland. Locations are coloured from yellow (deployment and autumn migration), through orange (wintering) to red (spring migration) and then retrieval.

During summer 2016, we fitted a further 11 tags to Red-necked Phalaropes and in 2017 we were able to recapture two birds and recover the data from the tags. Both birds had migrated by generally the same route to the same part of the Pacific Ocean as the first bird, so we now have three birds shown to have migrated from Fetlar to the Pacific and back.

Work in Iceland has shown that their birds also travel by roughly the same route and into the wintering grounds in the east Pacific. It is already known, from ringing recoveries, that Red-necked Phalaropes from Scandinavia and western Russia migrate south-east into the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. So, there would seem to be a migratory divide for this species through the North Sea with birds from Scotland and west migrating south-west to the Pacific and birds from Scandinavia and east migrating south-east to the Arabian Gulf. With this information, it is worth noting that the westerly migrating phalaropes migrate largely over the sea with only the narrow central American isthmus to cross. Whilst those migrating in an easterly direction fly largely over land with a few large water bodies such as the Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Lake Van to use as stop-overs.

Seabirds

Over the years we've had a number of seabirds recovered in Faroe waters, having been shot, we think for food. Two of our Guillemot chicks from 2016 have recently been reported as shot in

Faroe waters in autumn 2017. It seems that Faroese fishermen are still shooting our Guillemots and probably Kittiwakes and Razorbills as they have done for many years and indications are that few of these shot, ringed birds are being reported. As seabirds come under greater pressure this habit becomes totally unacceptable. Whilst Faroe is not a full member of the EU, it gets the benefits of the EU through Denmark. But it seems that the Faroese pay scant regards to EU Regulations. They claim that seabird hunting is a 'traditional industry'. It is. But it's not 'traditional' to use high-powered rifles, shot guns and Zodiacs with large out-boards to shoot wildlife.

Leach's Petrel

A bird ringed on Inner Farne, Northumberland on 29 July 2014 was retrapped there on 20 July 2016 and was caught 10 days later at Druridge Links, Northumberland. It was then controlled at Sumburgh Head, south Mainland on 26 July 2017. Although not too scarce in Shetland, Leach's Petrels are rare birds in Northumberland.

Greylag Goose

A neck-collared bird has given us a lot of information on its travels. It was first fitted with a collar on 10 July 2010 when it was a fledgling at Birsay, Orkney. It went south to spend the 2010/11 winter in Norfolk. It was back on Birsay for the summer 2011 but returned to Norfolk for winter 2011/12. Then it was seen at Vagar, Faroe in summer 2012 but was back in Orkney in the autumn 2012 before being seen in Norfolk in early 2013. It later turned up in in Faroe in 2013 where it bred, it was not reported away from Faroe in 2013–15. By March 2016, it was back in Orkney but returned to Faroe for the summer of that year. During the winter 2016/17, it was first seen at Sandwick, Shetland, before again summering in Faroe, but it was back at Sandwick during the 2017/18 winter. Although some people do not approve of neck collars on aesthetic grounds, if searched for and accurately reported, it is a method that gives a lot of detailed information on the movements of individuals which cannot be discovered by standard ringing methods.

Norwegian Blue Tits!

HC491193:

10/10/18 Frestad, Vest-Agder, Norway
V 16/11/18 Hoswick, Shetland, 501 km WNW

This is only the third Norwegian-ringed Blue Tit to be caught in the UK. The first was caught in Suffolk on 17 October 1994 and the second in Shetland on 17 October 2012.

Plate 48. Greylag Goose, ringed as an unfledged juvenile at Clumlie, South Mainland, Shetland in July 2015. © *Andrew Harrop*

Identification of Honey-buzzards on Scottish breeding grounds

K.D. SHAW, C.J. MCINERNY, K. GIBB & K. HOEY

Plate 49. Honey-buzzard plumage variation. The species can show a wide range of plumage colour. These images were painted from observations in south-west Scotland over many years. © *Ray Hawley*

The Honey-buzzard is a rare, secretive and elusive summer visitor and breeder in Scotland, and a scarce but regular passage migrant (McInerny & Shaw 2018a). Identification of this species, especially females and juveniles, can be challenging resulting in Honey-buzzards being overlooked and under recorded both as a breeder and migrant. Here we describe the field identification of Honey-buzzard, emphasising features especially useful on its breeding grounds. Furthermore, we show how individual birds can be recognised through plumage variability, greatly aiding their study.

Identification of Honey-buzzards - an overview

Most experienced raptor workers use a combination of features such as structure, flight pattern, plumage and feather moult pattern to identify Honey-buzzards. The exact combination of the features used will depend on factors such distance, light, viewing time and comparison species.

Structure and flight pattern

Structure and flight pattern are widely accepted as important features when identifying many species of raptors (Porter *et al.* 1998, Forsman 2016). This is particularly true for the Honey-buzzard, as the species' plumage can vary greatly.

Structure

The structure of Honey-buzzard is smaller bodied, longer winged and longer tailed than Buzzard (Plate 49). The small head of Honey-buzzard can sometimes be distinctive. However, these differences are subtle, and are influenced by how a bird is seen.

Flight pattern

Importantly, Honey-buzzards often soar on distinctly flat or slightly arched wings (Plate 49). This contrasts with the pronounced upturned wings of Buzzard in typical flight. However, adult Buzzards can sometimes fly on flat wings such as in strong winds, and juvenile Buzzards fly on flat wings for a short time after fledgling. But in both cases, this is usually less sustained, and such birds usually also show upturned wing flight. Hence, prolonged views are required to confirm flight patterns.

The 'relaxed' flight of the Honey-buzzard is another useful identification feature. It shows a more elastic flight action with the wing beat extending further below and above the body, compared with the Buzzard's stiffer, more rapid wing beats. This feature is most obvious on prolonged flight as Buzzards can adopt more relaxed wing beats, albeit briefly, when displaying or landing. Furthermore, the relaxed flight of Honey-buzzard can be at its most obvious when the bird is flying directly towards or directly away from the observer. At times, Honey-buzzards can look 'kite-like', partly because the species can move its tail in a similar fashion to a kite, although to a lesser extent. This is quite different to Buzzard.

Wing-clapping display

On the breeding grounds, the highly distinctive 'wing-clapping' or 'butterfly' display flight of Honey-buzzard is diagnostic for the species in Europe. No other European bird of prey flies in this manner. During the display flight, the wings are temporarily raised above the body, almost touching, during which the wings quiver (Plate 1, and Plate 4 in McInerny *et al.* 2018a). This movement lasts just 2–3 seconds before the wings are lowered and the bird flaps again to maintain flight. Such wing clapping is often repeated, sometimes with over 100 consecutive displays. Both males and females can wing clap, occasionally in response to each other.

There is variation in when and how often birds wing clap. Birds can wing clap at the beginning of the season to establish territories (McInerny & Shaw 2018b). But late July and August, especially when non-breeding birds are present, is when wing clapping occurs most often, with non-breeding males and females persistently displaying (Shaw *et al.* 2017, McInerny *et al.* 2018a, McInerny *et al.* 2018b).

The wing-clapping display of Honey-buzzards is obvious and spectacular. However, there are several other more subtle flight features that are also helpful for identifying the species on its breeding grounds. At certain times during the season Honey-buzzards will 'high soar', flying at great height over huge areas, sometimes to clouds bases. Honey-buzzards will also glide over very long distances without flapping, with their distinctive flat or arched wings. During these long

glides, birds can 'wing flick' regularly. Here, the outer wing is flicked down from the flat or arched wing posture. Buzzards can occasionally 'wing flick', but not so deeply or regularly as Honey-buzzards, particularly during long glides; and this rarely observed from flat or arched wings. Honey-buzzards also perform 'parallel flying' with two birds flying together, in the same way as Goshawks.

Plumage

Honey-buzzard plumage, especially males, shows wide variation, which complicates their field identification. This variation is illustrated in Plate 49, created by the late Ray Hawley. Ray studied Honey-buzzards for many years in south-west Scotland and the extent of his work has only recently been widely recognised.

As the plumage of Honey-buzzards is so variable, observers should instead focus on a combination of structure and flight for identification (Porter *et al.* 1998, Appleby 2012, Forsman 2016, Harwood & Richman 2016).

The bars on the tail of the Honey-buzzard can be a useful feature to separate birds from Buzzard, whose tail is plain. However, this feature can be difficult to see as the tail is often folded, when the barring is masked. It is more readily observed when birds are seen from above and the tail spread (Plate 50). Buzzards can readily be identified by having an unmarked orange tail. However, barring should be looked for as Honey-buzzards can rarely have orange tails, as shown by the individual *'Orangetail'* seen in central Scotland (Shaw *et al.* 2017).

Plate 50. The upperparts of a male Honey-buzzard *'Turnberry'* at the central Scotland Study Area 1, August 2018, showing the grey colour and barred tail. © *John Anderson*

Plates 51–52. The male Honey-buzzards *'Turnberry'* (top) and *'Shorty'* (bottom) at the central Scotland Study Area 1, August 2018. These two individuals are typical of the adult males seen in central Scotland, being pale grey morphs. © *John Anderson*

Males

Male Honey-buzzards are highly variable in plumage colour (Plate 1, Harwood & Richman 2016). In central Scotland pale grey morphs are the most common (Plates 51–52), but dark brown males are also present, with dark black and predominately white birds occasionally reported (McInerny *et al.* 2018a, McInerny *et al.* 2018b). The most useful features for separating males from females are the former having a grey head, a broader, well-defined dark trailing edge to the wing, and clean pale primaries (Forsman 2016).

Females

The plumage of females varies less than males (Harwood & Richman 2016). The upperparts are usually mid-brown with a brown or paler brown, but not grey, head. On the underwing the dark trailing edge is narrower and less well defined, often appearing 'smudgy', with the primary feathers darker towards the tips. These features, combined with a general plainness and a broader winged, shorter tailed appearance, allow the identification of females on breeding grounds.

However, identifying mature females can be challenging as they assume some characteristics of males (Forsman 2016). An example of this was the female *'Bournville'* observed in central Scotland during July 2018 (Plate 53). Though she has a prominent dark trailing edge to her wings suggesting a male, she has a dark brown upperparts and head, and was the partner of the male *Shorty* in Territory 5 of Study Area 1, producing two young in 2018 (McInerny *et al.* 2018a, McInerny *et al.* 2018b).

Juveniles

Forsman (2016) reports that juvenile Honey-buzzards are the amongst the most difficult identification challenge of Western Palearctic birds of prey. This is because juveniles are more similar, both in plumage and structure, to juvenile Buzzards than adult Honey-buzzards (Plate 54). This similarity is thought to be an evolutionary adaptation to offer the young Honey-buzzards protection from predators (Duff 2006).

Plate 53. The female Honey-buzzard '*Bournville*' at the central Scotland Study Area 1, July 2018. This mature bird shows some features of a male having a pronounced dark trailing edge to the wings and white primary feathers. But she has dark brown upperparts and a brown head, and was paired with the male '*Shorty*', who is shown in Plates 52, 55c, 56 and 58. © *Keith Hoey*

Plate 54. A juvenile Honey-buzzard at the central Scotland Study Area 1, September 2018. Birds of this age are best identified by structure and flight action, as their plumage is very similar to Buzzards. © *Keith Hoey*

Juvenile Honey-buzzards show some plumage variation, though less than adult males: up to 90% of juveniles are plain mid- to dark brown, very similar in colour to juvenile Buzzards. However, one useful feature to help identify juvenile Honey-buzzards is that they show an off-white crescent on the uppertail coverts. But, due to the similarity with Buzzards it is important to focus less on plumage details, but more on shape and particularly the flight action. Juveniles show the distinctive relaxed flight, with the deeper wing beat even more pronounced. They can also show the longer tail and head, though these are not as obvious as in adults.

Honey-buzzard moult

Understanding moult is critical when studying Honey-buzzards (Shaw *et al.* 2017). Both males and females can initiate primary feather moult on the breeding grounds (Appleby 2012, Harwood & Richman 2016). Forsman (2016) indicates that females moult (P2–4) at the onset of incubation in June, with males moulting primaries (P1–3) later in July and August. Moult begins with inner primary feathers and is normally sequential outwards, but on rare occasions birds may drop feathers out of this sequence. For both males and females, however, moult is suspended for autumn migration, and resumed on the winter grounds.

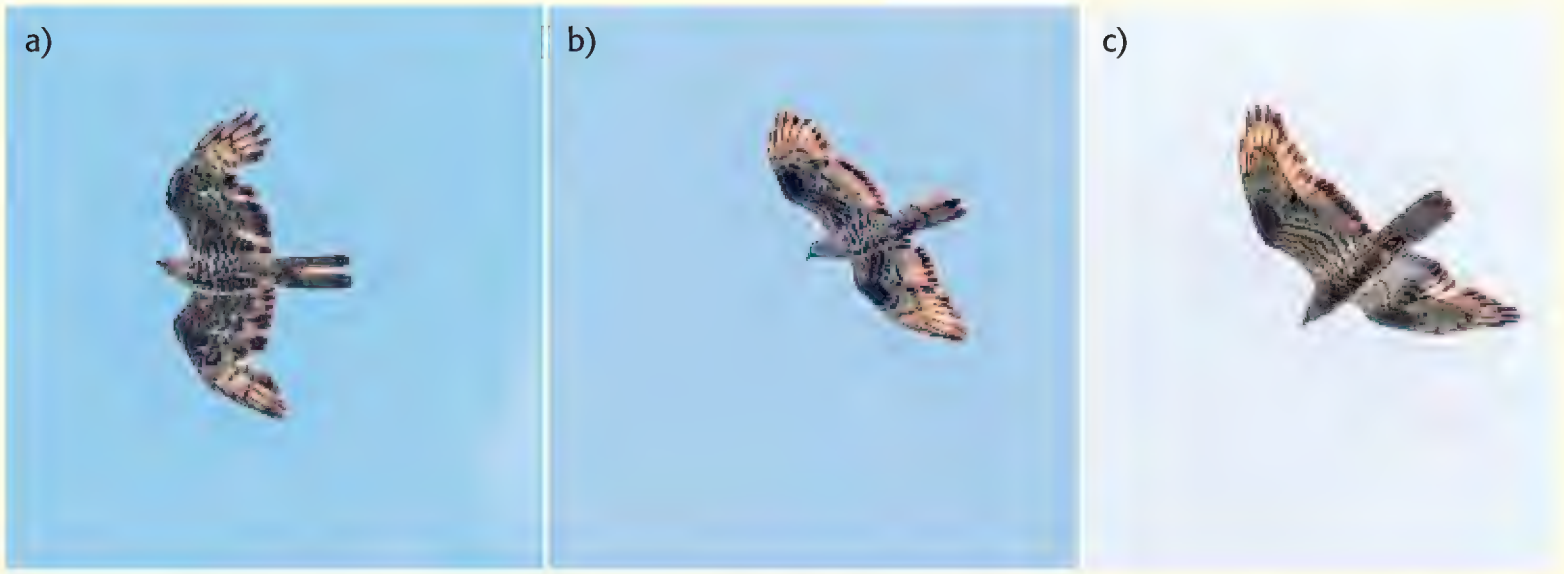

Plate 55 a–c. The Honey-buzzards *'Crail'* (a), *'Kirkcaldy'* (b) and *'Shorty'* (c) at the central Scotland Study Area 1, July 2018. All three grey morph males are superficially similar, but close examination of plumage patterns and feather moult/damage reveals that they are different. *'Crail'* and *'Kirkcaldy'* were non-breeders with *'Shorty'* a breeder, paired with the female *'Bournville'* shown in Plate 53. © *John Anderson*

Importantly, individual birds can moult feathers differently through the breeding season. Furthermore, Honey-buzzards damage and loose feathers. Combined, these variations, along with plumage and behavioural differences, allow individual birds to be recognised. Plate 55 shows three similar males, separated by different stages of feather moult and feather damage.

Plate 56. The male Honey-buzzard *'Shorty'* at the central Scotland Study Area 1, during the 2018 breeding season. Identical plumage patterns and feather moult/damage are indicated. Montage created from photos taken by John Anderson (JA), Harry Bell (HB) and Kris Gibb (KG). © *Kris Gibb*

Plate 57. The male Honey-buzzard *'Kirkcaldy'* at the central Scotland Study Area 1, during the 2018 breeding season. Identical plumage patterns and feather moult/damage are indicated. Montage created from photos taken by John Anderson (JA) and Kris Gibb (KG). © *Kris Gibb*

Plate 58. The male Honey-buzzard '*Shorty*' at the central Scotland Study Area 1, during the 2016 and 2018 breeding seasons. Identical plumage patterns and feather moult/damage are indicated. Montage created from photos taken by John Anderson (JA), Harry Bell (HB) and Dennis Morrison (DM). © *Kris Gibb*

Plate 59. The male Honey-buzzard '*Kirkcaldy*' at the central Scotland Study Area 1, during the 2016 and 2018 breeding seasons. Identical plumage patterns and feather moult/damage are indicated. Montage created from photos taken by John Anderson (JA), Kris Gibb (KG) and John Nadin (JSN). © *Kris Gibb*

In contrast, juveniles show no moult or feather damage. This pristine condition along with the plumage and structural features discussed, assists their identification.

Identification of individual Honey-buzzards on Scottish breeding grounds

The recognition of individuals is critical when studying breeding populations as it allows the identification of pairs, assigning pairs territories, and the characterisation of non-breeders and juveniles.

Through observations, field sketches and a catalogue of photographic images we have identified a large number of individual Honey-buzzards in central Scotland over a number of years (Shaw *et al.* 2017, McInerny *et al.* 2018a, McInerny *et al.* 2018b). To aid fieldwork and monitoring of populations, birds have been given names. Individuals have been seen on multiple occasions both within breeding seasons and between years. We show two examples, the birds '*Shorty*' and '*Kirkcaldy*', with montages of photos from 2018 (Plates 56–57) and 2016–18 (Plates 58–59). In both photomontages feather moult/re-growth and feather damage are highlighted, that allows individuals to be both identified and recognised.

Conclusions

In this paper we describe features to allow the identification of Honey-buzzards, both the species, but also individuals. We hope that this information will be useful to observers interested in seeing Honey-buzzards in Scotland, and encourage the search for the raptor in new areas where it may be breeding but so far remains undetected.

Acknowledgements

We thank the rest of the 'HZ Team', particularly John Nadin, Andrew Whewell, Bruce Kerr, Ali Little, Kenny Little, Davie Abraham, Angus Hogg, Rick Goater and Graham Sparshott. We thank John Anderson for the use of his photos. The late Ray Hawley remains an inspiration; his work is appreciated by active birdwatchers and ornithologists. Thanks also to Ray's family and Chris Rollie for permission to use the image in Plate 49. Our positive relationships with the various Raptor Study Groups, the Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) Licensing Department, and particularly Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) and Forest Enterprise Scotland (FES) staff are important to us. We received funding from Glasgow Natural History Society, Professor Blodwen Lloyd Binns Bequest and the SOC to support the work.

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Ken D. Shaw, 13 Chalmers Brae, Anstruther, Fife KY10 3BY.
Email: kenshaw495@gmail.com

Christopher J. McInerny, 10 Athole Gardens, Glasgow G12 9AZ.
Email: Chris.McInerny@glasgow.ac.uk

Kris Gibb, 46 Winifred Crescent, Kirkcaldy, Fife KY2 5SX.
Email: krisgibb@hotmail.co.uk

Keith Hoey, 23 Dempsey Road, Bellshill, North Lanarkshire ML4 2UF.
Email: keithhoopoehoey@yahoo.co.uk

Plate 60. Caspian Gull, Leven Beach, Fife, May 2018. In the foreground, right of the two Lesser Black-backed Gulls. Note the clean and contrasting appearance compared to the other immature gulls present. © *Mark Wilkinson*

Caspian Gull, Leven Beach, 11–13 May 2018 – the first record for Fife

M.A. WILKINSON

On 11 May 2018, around 17:00 hrs I was passing through Leven, Fife, and thought a quick check of the gulls at Leven Beach might be worthwhile, as I knew that the tide should be on its way out. My main target was to try and find a late Iceland Gull, or perhaps a Mediterranean Gull.

However, within a few minutes of starting to check the 250 or so large gulls present, I noticed an interesting looking immature gull, possessing a very white head, a pale grey mantle with dark 'anchor-marks' and very contrasting dark brown tertials. Unfortunately, within five seconds or so of getting on the bird, the entire flock was flushed by a nearby windsurfer. I had to wait until the wheeling flock re-settled, though rather worryingly several gulls headed off inland over the town centre. Fortunately, I quickly relocated the same gull, but this time had even less time (only three seconds or so), before the flock flushed again! I noted a fairly solid looking brown tail band (with some damage to the central tail feathers) and a long-winged appearance as the bird took off, but very little else. Again, some birds flew off, but the majority landed again, and luckily the windsurfer moved away and the gulls finally began to look more settled.

By this point the time was around 17:30 hrs. With the bird relocated for a third time, I finally got my first decent look at it for more than a handful of seconds. Everything pointed towards

Plate 61. Caspian Gull, Leven Beach, Fife, May 2018. Note the long drooping bill, the predominantly white underwing coverts (with some brown flecking), the long keel-shaped body, and obvious ventral bulge. © *Barry Farquharson*

it being a Caspian Gull in second-calendar year plumage, with the bird showing all of the SBRC identification criteria (McInerny 2010), consisting of a thin and slightly drooping bill, long spindly pink legs, a clean white head with a noticeable grey neck shawl, pale grey mantle with thin dark anchor marks, solidly brown greater coverts with pale tips forming a faint wing-bar, unmarked dark brown tertials, long black primaries, and a white tail with a solid brown tail band (although the tips of the central two to three feathers were clearly damaged). Most of these features are visible in Plate 60.

In flight, the bird showed the characteristic white underwing coverts of this species in immature plumage, a long keel-shaped body, and an obvious ventral bulge (Plate 61).

The bird was relocated the following morning in the same spot, before flying off west over Methil Docks at 08:15 hrs, which at least allowed approximately eight early-risers to add it to their Fife lists. The final sighting was back at Leven Beach early morning on 13 May, before the bird disappeared for the final time.

Current status of Caspian Gull (and Yellow-legged Gull) in Scotland

Caspian Gull is a rare winter visitor to Scotland, with just nine accepted records up to and including 2016, after the first occurrence at Belhaven Bay, Lothian on 28 December 2006 (Davison 2009). This does not include an additional bird recorded 'at sea' c. 85 km east of the Out Skerries, Shetland on 6 February 2015 (Lewis 2017), which is not included in the official SBRC statistics.* Previous records are spread almost equally between October and April, and the Fife record automatically becomes the latest spring record (Figure 1).

Caspian Gull's core range extends eastwards from across the Black and Caspian Seas and into Kazakhstan, but it has recently expanded westwards. Poland was colonized from the 1990s, and parts of eastern Germany from the early 2000s, with the first breeding record in The Netherlands confirmed as recently as 2015, with remarkably no less than four breeding pairs recorded there in 2016 (Boele *et al.* 2018). This dramatic westward expansion shows no sign of slowing, so more Scottish records can surely be expected.

* It should be noted that all data used in this article is taken directly from the Scottish Birds Records Committee (SBRC) database, which provides an invaluable resource for anyone wishing to analyse the occurrence of rare birds in Scotland, with records published annually in 'Scottish Birds Records Committee report on rare birds in Scotland' (McGowan & McInerny 2016, 2017 & 2018).

It is worth comparing the occurrence pattern of Caspian Gull with that of the closely related Yellow-legged Gull, which has a noticeably different occurrence pattern. Yellow-legged Gull (of the nominate race *michahellis*) is a scarce but annual visitor to Scotland with 36 accepted records, up to and including 2016, after the first at the Ugie Estuary, North-east Scotland on 15 August 1998. It occurs as a winter visitor to Scotland between late November and early May (19 records, some of which have stayed for a considerable period of time, or even returned in subsequent winters), but there is also a significant secondary peak (17 records), of birds arriving between late June and early October, presumably of birds making a post breeding dispersal (Figure 2). There is one ringing recovery, of an adult on Foula, Shetland on 6–7 July 2014 (found dead on the latter date), which had been ringed as a pullus at Stagno di Mistras, Sardinia, Italy on 5 May 2000, a movement of 2366 km in a NN-W direction (G. Atherton *in litt.*).

Although excluded from these statistics, it should be noted that there is a recently accepted Scottish record of an 'Azorean' Yellow-legged Gull, of the subspecies *atlantis*, concerning a near-adult individual from Barra, Outer Hebrides on 10 September 2005 (Stoddart & McInerny 2017). It is possible that other Scottish records could also relate to this subspecies.

Geographically, there is also a different pattern emerging between the two species (Figure 3). In Scotland, Caspian Gulls are far more likely on the east coast, as would be expected for a bird coming from Eastern Europe or the near Continent, with just a single record penetrating further west to Clyde (McInerny & Hoey, 2015). Lothian with six records, is the only county with more than a single bird. This is a similar pattern to the rest of Britain, where the majority occur in the south and east, and where it remains extremely rare in Wales, for example (Jones 2015).

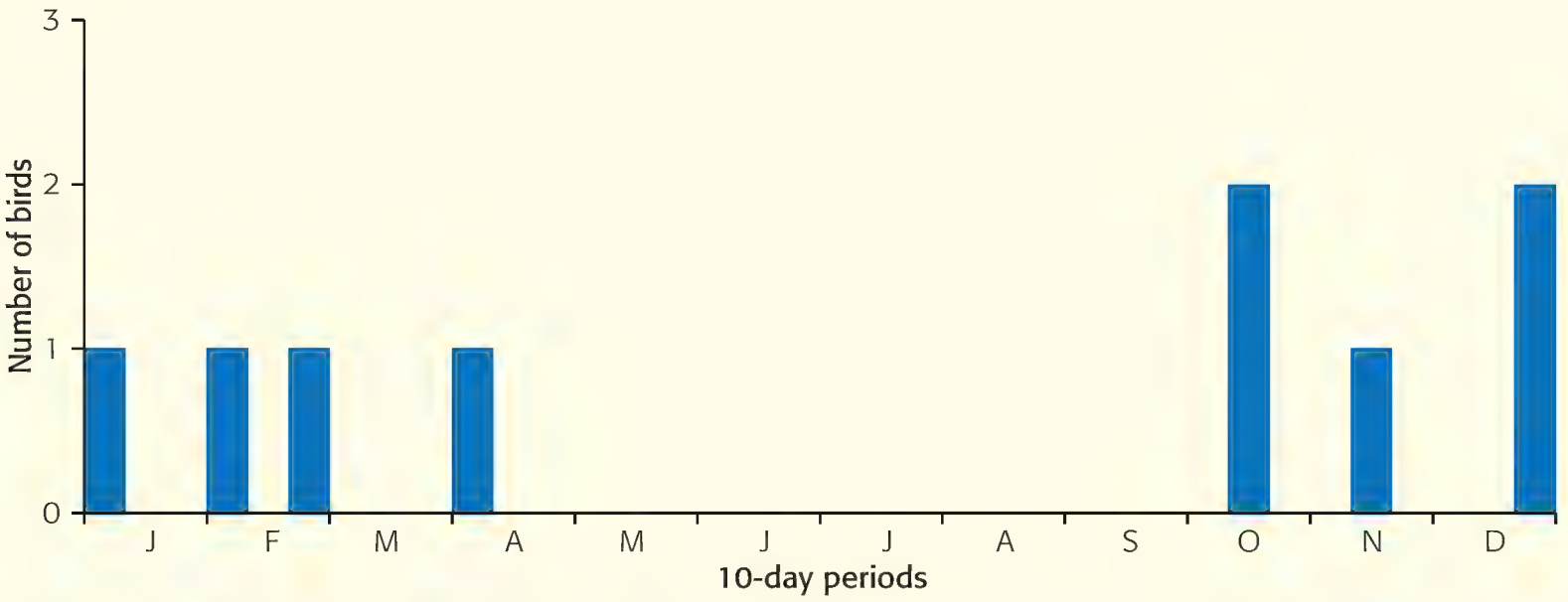

Figure 1. Occurrence pattern of the nine accepted records of Caspian Gull by 10-day periods (to 2016).

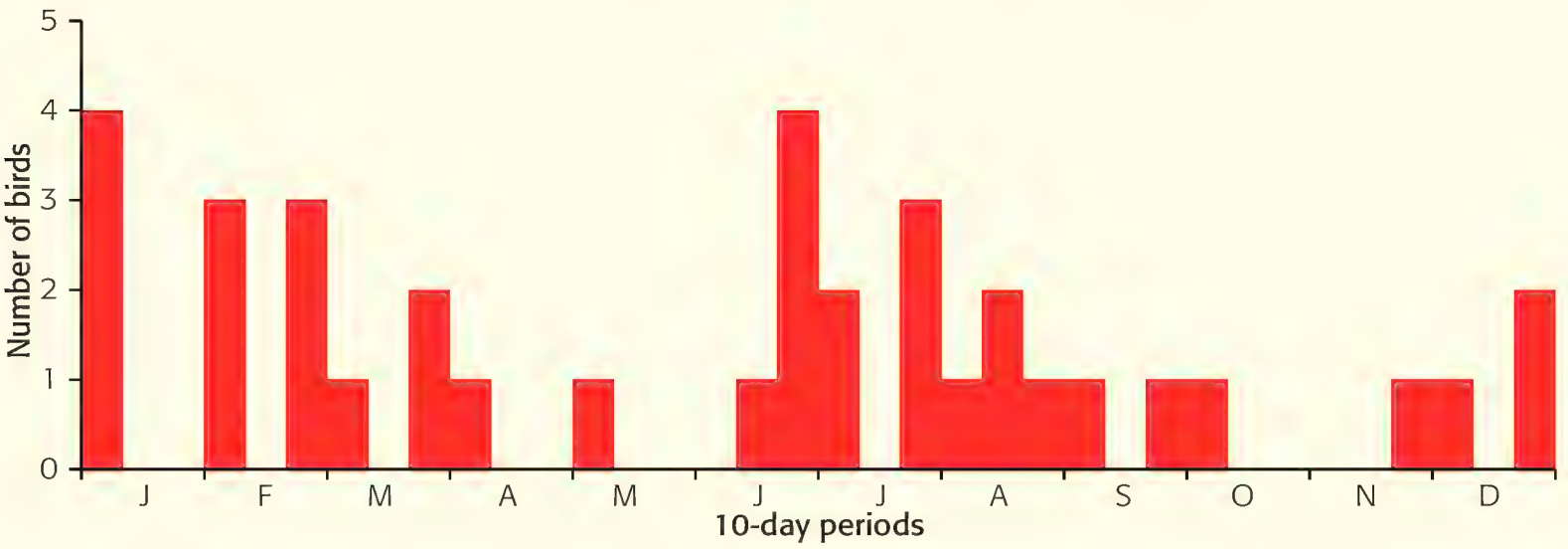

Figure 2. Occurrence pattern of the 36 accepted records of Yellow-legged Gull by 10-day periods (to 2016).

Yellow-legged Gull, on the other hand, has a much more westerly bias in Scotland, with Clyde (eight records) leading the pack, but with Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway and the Outer Hebrides with four records each figuring prominently. In contrast, it is much scarcer on the east coast, although North-east Scotland is a notable exception, with five accepted records between 1998 and 2006, although none since. Presumably the majority of Scottish birds originate from Iberia, and are following a more westerly route when dispersing northwards. Additionally, in the west of Scotland at least, Yellow-legged Gulls are frequently located amongst groups of Lesser Black-backed Gulls, and it has been postulated that this species acts as a 'carrier species' for Yellow-legged Gull during their northward migration through the Mediterranean region.

Conclusions

Caspian Gull is a rare winter visitor to Scotland, and is most likely to be found on the east coast between mid-October and mid-May. However, with a continuing westwards range expansion, it is likely to become increasingly regular in Scotland.

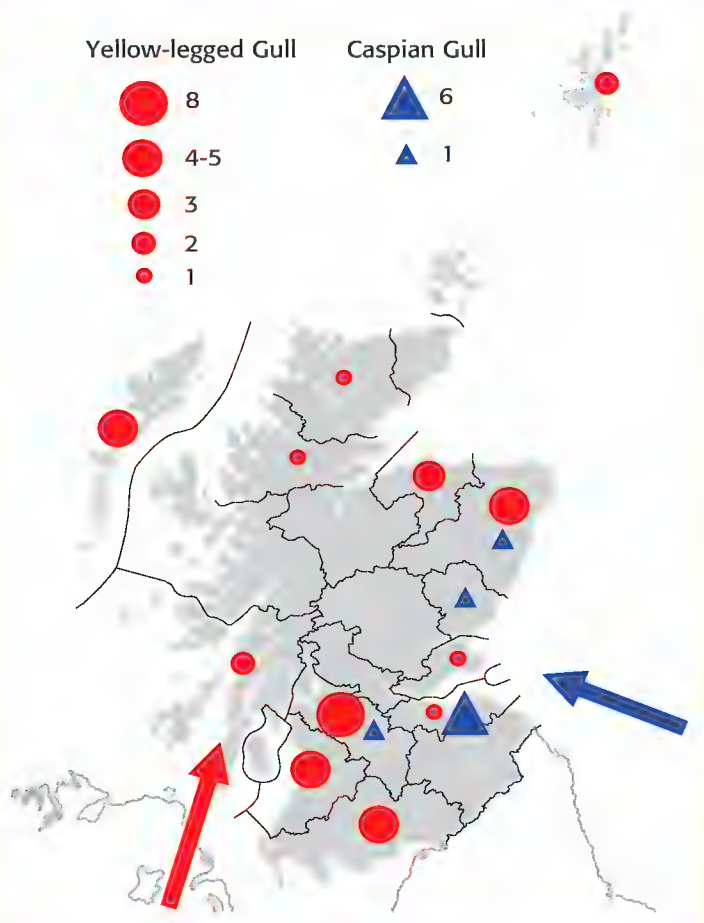

Figure 3. Occurrence pattern of the accepted records of Caspian and Yellow-legged Gulls by recording area (to 2016). The arrows indicate possible arrival vectors.

In contrast, Yellow-legged Gull is much more likely to be found on the west coast, either as returning winter birds, or in late summer as part of the post breeding dispersal from the primarily Mediterranean breeding grounds.

It will be interesting to see if this pattern continues in the coming years. Alternatively, could it be that east coast observers are simply overlooking Yellow-legged Gulls, or are west coast birders missing Caspian Gulls? Only time will tell, but there is much still to be discovered from a Scottish perspective with these two fascinating species.

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Mark Wilkinson, 108/10 Comiston Road, Edinburgh EH10 5QL.
Email: mark.a.wilkinson@blueyonder.co.uk

Plate 62. Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Isle of May, 11 September 2018. © *David Steel*

Buff-breasted Sandpipers, Isle of May, 11 September 2018 – the first island record

B. ETHERIDGE & M. MARQUISS

Apart from the day of arrival, our week (8–15 September 2018) at the Isle of May Bird Observatory was dominated by strong westerly winds which subsequently persisted, after we left, for much of the month. The 11th was a particularly cloudy, cool and windy day. Following a morning doing the island rounds and finding no new arrivals and very few birds, the team were back to the Obs in the early afternoon for our daily fry-up, toast and tea.

Around 15:30, BE and MM, out of sheer boredom, ventured outside for a planned walk to the South Horn to count the Kittiwake flock that regularly assembles there in the late afternoon. Initially, we couldn't make our minds up which way to go - along the more sheltered Holyman's Road on the east side or up McLeod's Path to the Main Light? We opted for the latter.

Once there another decision was needed - was it down Palpitation Brae or use Haven Road? Luckily, we chose Haven Road. We had not gone more than 100 m along it and were approaching the heli-pad when two small waders standing on the rabbit-mown turf just beyond the pad caught our attention. Buffeted by the strong cross-wind, we had barely got our bins on them when they were up, flying away and quickly out of sight round the rise on our north side. BE initially thought Golden Plover but they were too small, then Turnstone flashed through his mind but they didn't look right for that species and the habitat was wrong.

BE quickly scribbled some notes - "two small waders, bigger than Dunlin, Turnstone size. Bright underparts, brownish spangled uppers, no white visible in tail or upperparts, no wing bar, views brief. No calls heard". Thankfully, moments later, one bird returned but landed partially in dead ground giving only a front view of the upper breast and head, both of which appeared a rich orangy-buff. The bill looked shortish and straight.

MM recalls that when the one bird resettled in front of us, he noted the rounded head with short bill and for him particularly, the dark eye emphasised by the pale buff eye ring. It is a characteristic head shape and pattern that sticks in his memory and that is the main feature that he visually recalls from previous sightings too.

We looked at each other and immediately said "Buff-breasted Sandpipers", a species with which we both had previous experience. BE quickly phoned colleagues at the Low Light and then tried to contact the SNH warden, David Steel, but only got his answer phone. Whilst MM stayed with the bird, BE ran as fast as a 72-year old could, down Palpitation Brae to look for SNH staff. Luckily, he met Steely heading into his accommodation carrying a tray with the preparations of his evening meal. His shout of "Buff-breasted Sandpiper by the heli-pad" was met by an expletive, the tray was dropped, scope, bins and camera bag grabbed in an instance, a quick rush next door to Fluke Street to alert Bex and Sally and Steely was running past BE as he headed back up the brae!

On reaching the top we were met with the dismal news from the assembled team that the bird MM was 'guarding' had flown off again in the same direction as previously. After what seemed an agonising age but was probably only 10 minutes, one of the sandpipers was located on the short turf between the Beacon and the top of MacLeod's Path where it presented excellent views to everyone on the island. It was now possible to see in detail the plumage, the yellow legs and the short black bill. It was not disturbed again and was still present when we all departed after five o'clock. Neither bird was seen again.

No other observers on the island saw two birds together. However, BE and MM are confident that their initial encounter of two waders by the heli-pad were the same species and were both Buff-breasted Sandpipers. This constitutes not only the first record of this species on the May, but also the first record of any North American bird on the island.

Brian Etheridge, Avoch Ross-shire
brian@milvus.myzen.co.uk
Mick Marquiss, m.marquiss@btinternet.com

Buff-breasted Sandpiper status in Scotland

Buff-breasted Sandpiper is a Nearctic species with a breeding range in the high Arctic from the north-east coast of Alaska eastwards to north-central Canada. It shows a strong preference for short grass in its breeding, migration and wintering habitats. It winters primarily in the pampas regions of Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, and migrates through central Canada and the Great Plains of the USA.

This is the second commonest Nearctic wader to occur in Scotland (after Pectoral Sandpiper) and was removed from the list of species assessed by SBRC from 1 January 2007. By then, 184 had been recorded in Scotland, with 28 of those in 2005 and 21 in 2006 alone. The greatest numbers of sightings were from the Outer Hebrides, followed by Orkney and Argyll and then Lothian. There are records from all areas except Angus & Dundee, Upper Forth, Clyde Islands, the Isle of May and Borders.

Most birds are noted in autumn between late July and the end of October, with fewer in spring, between 4 May and 27 June, and one in summer from 23 June to 27 July (Loch Borve, Berneray, Outer Hebrides 1995), and the Isle of May birds fit well the autumn window of occurrence.

The adjacent recording area of Fife has several times hosted birds within sight of the Isle of May: two near Crail on 12–14 September 1977, up to three birds at Balcomie, Fife Ness on 12–22 September 1996 and singles at Balcomie on 28 September 2013 and 22 September 2016. In addition, Lothian has had 15 birds found between Aberlady Bay and Tyninghame to the end of 2017 such that an occurrence on the Isle of May is not a complete surprise.

Prior to the occurrence of the Isle of May individual a juvenile was seen just north of Fife Ness at Kenly Burn, near Kingsbarns (Fife) on 8 September, while a juvenile was present at White Sands Quarry, Lothian on 21–22 September 2018 - suggesting several individuals could have been present in eastern Scotland in September 2018.

Plate 63. Woodchat Shrike, Barns Ness, Lothian, September 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

Woodchat Shrike, Barns Ness, 16–29 September 2018 – third record for Lothian

I.J. ANDREWS & M. TILL

Mike Till found this bird late in the morning of 16 September 2018. He was uncertain as to the bird's identity but phoned the sighting in to SOC Waterston House. The news went out as 'an interesting pale shrike' (although this was later changed to a Red-backed Shrike by BirdGuides) but the location information was somewhat contradictory.

Intrigued by this and suspecting it may be something 'interesting', IJA arrived at the now-clarified location of the bird - Barns Ness wire dump - at just after 14:00. The bird was visible almost immediately and after a short while was identified as a juvenile/first-winter Woodchat Shrike. Many people saw the bird over its long stay as it kept to a relatively small area and frequently used the same perches while on the look-out for bees and other insects.

Once identified as a Woodchat Shrike, the rufous wash to the rear crown and nape suggested that it was a male. The pale scapulars (typical of a juvenile bird) were not immediately obvious and the mantle was not as scalloped as expected. This was due to the fact that the bird had started its moult into first-winter plumage rather than being in text-book juvenile plumage. There were only a few juvenile feathers remaining on the mantle but it had retained all its scalloped body feathers on its breast and flanks. The pale patch at the base of the primaries was well developed (ruling out 'Balearic Woodchat Shrike' ssp. *badius*) but the patch was not pure white and the tail lacked white at its base (both ruling out the eastern ssp. *niloticus*). The lower upper tail coverts were distinctly rufous, the upper ones rather paler. Overall, the size and shape of the bird was quite

different from the longer-tailed Red-backed Shrike and was distinctly sparrow-like in proportions as it sat on the Elder bushes.

Interestingly, the bird had started its moult from juvenile into first-winter plumage, indicating that it had fledged some time previously. Although early breeding and early moult is given as a 'feature' of the eastern race *niloticus* (Rowlands 2010, Shirihai & Svensson 2018), the Barns Ness bird didn't show white at the base of the tail to suggest that this bird was anything but a typical nominate race *senator.*

There are two previous Lothian records both from the mid-1960s: at Barns Ness on 4–15 September 1965 (Macdonald 1966) and at Tyninghame on 19 August 1967 (Tait 1968). The first was found at Barns Ness in the old quarry (now known as the 'wire dump') during a fall. It was trapped the next day and found to be "an unmoulted [adult] female in very scruffy abraded plumage." The Tyninghame bird, also an adult based on the published description, was watched by Craigie Tait for 25 minutes perched on a wire fence and wooden posts.

Plate 64. Woodchat Shrike, Barns Ness, Lothian, September 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

Plate 65. Woodchat Shrike, Barns Ness, Lothian, September 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

Although vagrant Woodchat Shrikes occur annually in Scotland, the vast majority of these are seen on the Northern Isles. Up to 2016, each mainland recording area had only registered five or fewer sightings, with five on both the Isle of May and Outer Hebrides, 16 on Orkney, 24 on Shetland and 30 on Fair Isle. It remains a rare bird on the Scottish mainland so it is maybe understandable that it was 51 years since the last Lothian record and the obliging bird was much appreciated by local birders.

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Ian Andrews, Musselburgh.
Email: ijandrews@live.com

Mike Till.
Email: weerae@icloud.com

Plate 66. 'Isabelline Shrike' regarded as showing features of Daurian Shrike, Dun Scurrival, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 2 October 2018. © *Keith Gillon*

Daurian (Isabelline) Shrike, Barra, 2–10 October 2018 – the first (second Isabelline) for the Outer Hebrides

I.N. RICKETTS

Hopes were high on the morning of Tuesday 2 October 2018. The winds had been westerly for ages and Saturday had seen the arrival of the 'Barraboys', giving a full complement of the usual visiting team of birders. It was therefore no surprise to learn that the discussion the previous evening had centred around 'what American species were we going to find'?

The day was quite cold, with some quite heavy showers coming through on a brisk westerly wind. I had birded a couple of sites in the south of the island without any success, and decided to head towards the north of the island. I looked around the main areas of Eoligarry, and again saw very little, so I decided to drive towards Scurrival and check a couple of the outlying gardens.

The road towards Scurrival goes past a couple of fields which are used for cattle grazing, plus there are a few isolated houses on either side of the road. One house has a driveway, which I parked on. From this vantage point it is quite easy to scan across fields and to have an initial look at one of the target gardens. With the weather deteriorating at this point, I chose the easy option and wound the window of the car down.

The garden itself is not large; it has some large bushes around the side of the house, a couple of small bushes in front of the house and a small grassy area beside a short driveway. The garden is demarcated by a wire fence with old wooden posts.

With rain and wind now blowing straight into the car, I checked through the bushes. Almost immediately, I saw a pale grey shape that appeared to be sheltering under a canopy of leaves. Knowing the garden well, I remember thinking that I don't remember seeing anything like that in that bush before. I was still not sure about what I was looking at, so I picked up the telescope and focused on the grey shape. As I did, the shape moved.

I knew immediately it was a shrike species but at that moment panic set in. I abandoned the car with windows open and walked the 50 m up the road to where I could get better views. Setting up the scope, and now in driving rain, I quickly located the bird. My initial view was of a pale greyish shrike with a red tail. Panic went into overdrive for a few moments. I knew it was an 'Isabelline' type and my brain started dredging my memory on how to tell if it was a Daurian or Turkestan. Fortunately, within a few seconds a calmer voice inside said 'Just get the news out you fool.'

I first called Bruce Taylor who was only about five minutes away and was the first to arrive. We rapidly went through the features and concluded quickly that it was probably Daurian. We also managed to get some record shots. At times it would fly deeper into the garden and would disappear from view for a few minutes. When all the remaining birders on the island arrived, there was an agonising wait of about 20 minutes before it re-appeared.

When it did re-appear, it went back into its favoured bush, which was about 15 m away from where we were all gathered on the road. It stayed loyal to this bush for much of its stay. It would occasionally fly onto the grassy area to presumably grab some poor unsuspecting grub and back up to its perch. Shortly after, we had all gathered things could have gone a bit awry due to the arrival of the postman. We knew that to get to the front door of the house he would need to park his van next to the shrike's favoured tree, and walk underneath it. Where it would go to was probably in the thoughts of all of us. To our great surprise it didn't move!

Plate 67. 'Isabelline Shrike' regarded as showing features of Daurian Shrike, Dun Scurrival, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 2 October 2018. © *Keith Gillon*

On the strength of it not being flushed by the postman's proximity, Keith Gillon, Iain English and I decided to try and get a little closer and get some better photos. Again, the shrike seemed oblivious to our presence. Out of respect, I went to knock on the door of the owner to let them know what we were doing - they were fine with us being on their land. At one point the shrike pooped onto the tree. Stuart Rivers suggested we collected the sample for DNA analysis and it was quickly collected by KG. Although the bird was only a couple of metres away, it was difficult to get any decent photographs as it was above head height. It then did something we didn't expect.

The shrike flew towards us and landed on the wire fence at the side of the road, and right in front of Calum Scott, Mark Oksien and Kathy Taylor. At times, it was probably only a metre away and just sitting very contently and posing for photographs. Indeed, the only birder who wasn't carrying a camera, Tony O'Connor decided to snap away on his phone, securing good shots and nice video footage!

The Daurian Shrike stayed loyal to the garden for the next nine days. Occasionally, it would be a bit difficult to see, but most of the time it would sit out in the open and often very close to any observers.

Ian Ricketts, Balnabodach, Barra.
Email: i.n.ricketts@gmail.com

'Isabelline Shrike' status in Scotland

*This species has a complicated taxonomic history, with Isabelline Shrike previously considered a subspecies (Red-tailed Shrike) of Red-backed Shrike, and more recently split as a separate species with at least five sub-species. With the decision by the BOU to adopt the taxonomy of the International Ornithological Congress from 1 January 2018, the position is now to regard 'Isabelline Shrike' as two species: Turkestan Shrike (*Lanius phoenicuroides*), and Daurian Shrike (*L. isabellinus*) with the latter including the subspecies* arenarius *and* tsaidamensis.

Turkestan Shrike breeds from central and NE Iran north-eastward to central Kazakhstan and eastwards from Afghanistan to easternmost China, and Daurian Shrike east from there into southern Russia, Mongolia and central China. Both species are entirely migratory heading south-west to wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa east to Eritrea, and south through East Africa to Tanzania, in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula, NE Saudi Arabia, and southern Iran, southern Afghanistan to northern Pakistan and NE India.

There have been 103 accepted records of 'Isabelline Shrike' in Britain to the end of 2017, with a handful of these assigned as definitely Daurian Shrike, or as Turkestan Shrike, but the great majority were not ascribed to race/species at the time. Those not previously identified to (sub)species level will be re-assessed by BBRC to determine which may be identifiable to one or other species following adoption of the IOC taxonomy.

Of the 103 accepted 'Isabelline Shrike' records the vast majority (93) have been found in autumn between the dates of 8 September and 23 November. This window includes all birds accepted as Daurian Shrike (assuming one found long dead in Surrey on 21 March 1994 was an autumn arrival). By contrast there are 10 records outside of this period - March/April (1), May (3), June (2), July (2) and August (2), with eight of these believed to show characteristics of Turkestan Shrike, and two unassigned (Sussex March/April 1975 and Devon August 2001).

In Scotland there have been 30 'Isabelline Shrikes' with none currently accepted as Turkestan Shrike, but two as Daurian:

***2002: Shetland**, adult male, Tresta, Fetlar, 14–17 September*

***2014: Orkney**, adult female, North Ronaldsay, 15–20 September*

The other 28 records in Scotland have all been found in autumn between 26 September and 30 November, with the exception of an adult male on Fair Isle on 12–13 May 1960. These include the first British record of an 'Isabelline': an adult male on the Isle of May on 26 September 1950. The 2002 Fetlar bird is currently the first accepted Daurian Shrike for Britain, prior to the current BBRC review of all records.

A female at Dunglass, Borders on 13 September 1989 was previously assigned to Daurian Shrike but is now part of the BBRC review, as are potential Daurian birds on North Ronaldsay in 1991 and Shetland 2012. A bird on Fair Isle in 1994 was previously considered phoenicuroides*, but is also being re-assessed. As is the Fair Isle bird in 1960, which showed characteristics of the form* 'karelini' *which is variously considered a full species, a subspecies of* phoenicuroides *or a hybrid with Red-backed Shrike, with the additional issue that* 'karelini' *is not recognised under IOC taxonomy. The two birds on Foula in 2017 (Wilkinson* et al. *2018) were not assigned to species by BBRC, with the mitochondrial DNA of the darker bird analysed but not sufficiently definitive to conclusively identify it as a Turkestan Shrike and it was decided to leave it as undifferentiated following a split vote by BBRC (Holt 2018).*

Geographically, 23 of the 30 Scottish records (77%) have come from the Northern Isles (13 Shetland; five Fair Isle; five Orkney), while elsewhere there are single records from the Outer Hebrides (2006), NE Scotland (2016), Angus (2005), Fife (1993), the Isle of May (1950) and two from Borders (1989 & 1999). The distribution of the 74 records in England and Wales is spread between virtually all coastal counties, with most in the east and south of England.

Whereas the identification of 'classic' adult Daurian and Turkestan Shrikes can be fairly

straightforward, the range of normal individual variation is quite poorly documented, while the occurrence of hybrids (between these species and with Red-backed Shrike) can give rise to a variety of intermediate and confusing birds (Lefranc & Worfolk 1997). Equally, immature birds currently pose a major identification challenge (but see Garner 2014, Wilkinson et al. *2018 & van Duivendijk 2010).*

There is a belief that Daurian Shrike is the more regular vagrant to Britain, despite, or more likely because of, its more easterly breeding range (longer distance migrant), with Turkestan Shrike rarer, but the species most likely to occur outside the autumn period. Whether or not this proves to be true will hopefully become clearer following the BBRC review.

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The previous record of an 'Isabelline Shrike' on the Outer Hebrides, present at Brue, Lewis on 22–29 September 2006 and remarkably refound at Brevig, Barra on 30 September and staying to 1 October 2006 (Plates 68 a–b), was regarded as showing features of Turkestan Shrike (OH BR 2005/2006) but accepted as a Daurian/Turkestan Shrike by BBRC.

The 2018 Barra record is subject to acceptance by BBRC.

Plate 68 a–b. 'Isabelline Shrike' regarded as showing features of Turkestan Shrike, Breibhig, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 1 October 2006. The record was accepted as a Daurian/Turkestan Shrike by BBRC. © *Keith Gillon*

Plate 69. Pechora Pipit, Castlebay, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 15 October 2018. © *Ian Ricketts*

Pechora Pipit, Castlebay, Barra, 13–15 October 2018 – the second Outer Hebrides record

I.N. RICKETTS

It would be fair to say that I am quite predictable. During the autumn, I would always drive from my house to Castlebay and start my birding day looking around the football pitch. Behind the goal at the western end and along part of the southern end there is a plantation of trees that according to the locals was planted as a wind break for the houses in Horve. These trees once extended along more of the southern border, but alas we lost half of them at the beginning of 2018, cleared for the building of houses. It could have been worse as the initial planning permission had been granted to take all the trees away from the southern end, and it was only objections from the local Barra folk that kept some woodland.

Through the centre of the southern area of trees there is a path that is occasionally used by people taking a short cut from one part of Horve to another. It is in this area that a Grey-cheeked Thrush and an Ovenbird have been seen in the past, as have a host of other scarce migrants.

Therefore, it was no surprise that just after 09:00 on Saturday 13 October I started down the steps that lead to the path at the southern end. Winds had been from a westerly direction for a couple of weeks and although finding a Daurian Shrike the week before on westerly winds should have taught me to expect anything from any direction, my mindset was firmly in the 'what yank could I find.'

I had gone about a quarter of the way along the path, about 10 metres, when I very briefly saw a bird low down sitting at the base of the tree. I only managed to get my binoculars onto it for less than a second before it disappeared. The bird was front on. It was obviously a pipit but all I saw was strong black streaking on the breast and a brown streaky head. My initial thought

was immediately Pechora Pipit. However, I quickly ruled that out on the feeble reason that this was the Outer Hebrides and it was blowing from the west. I looked for the next half hour but could not relocate the bird.

I met with Bruce and Kathy Taylor who were coming the opposite way. I told Bruce that I had seen an 'odd' pipit briefly, but I didn't know what it was, and I had lost it. All credit to Bruce as he probably suspected I had made a mess of something, so as I continued to look further along the track, Bruce decided to go further into the wood. He hadn't gone very far in when he called me back with the words 'It's a Pechora' Ever seen a cartoon when the figure turns into a donkey? That was me. I quickly located the bird on the ground, this time seeing it well. It most definitely was a Pechora.

We quickly got the news out to all the other birders staying on the island, and onto the news services. Iain English was just the other side of Castlebay and arrived quickly. Although we knew the area where the bird was, the terrain inside the wood with undulating ground made viewing difficult at times. Knowing Keith Gillon and Tony O'Connor were due to leave the island the next day there was a bit of pressure in locating the bird. It took about an hour but Calum Scott finally located it in deep cover. It then moved along open ground where we all managed to get good views of the Pechora. To our surprise and delight it then came out and crossed the path in front of us - superb. The news it was still present was very quickly relayed to the birders in South Uist, and Yvonne Benting and Ian Thompson managed to get across to see it that afternoon, helped by Bruce and Stuart Rivers who celebrated with another Turkish Delight ice-cream that night.

Plate 70. Pechora Pipit, Castlebay, Barra, Outer Hebrides, 15 October 2018. © *Ian Ricketts*

The Pechora Pipit remained in the area and was last seen on the 15 October. Despite being difficult to see on the first morning it showed well during most of the next two days and was a very obliging individual.

Ian Ricketts, Balnabodach, Barra.
Email: i.n.ricketts@gmail.com

Pechora Pipit status in Scotland

This Palearctic species breeds east of the Ural Mountains across northern Siberia to Kamchatka and adjacent islands and with separate populations in lowland areas of SE Russia and NE China. The populations are entirely migratory and winter in the Philippines and Indonesia.

There have been 108 accepted records in Britain to the end of 2017, with the vast majority (89%) of these records from the Northern Isles, with 51 on Shetland, 40 on Fair Isle and five on Orkney (all North Ronaldsay). There have been just two other records in Scotland: one at St. Fergus, NE Scotland on 11 October 1993 and at Knock-cuien, North Uist, Outer Hebrides on 4–5 October 2008.

Elsewhere there have been singles in Yorkshire (Spurn 1966; Filey 1994), the Isle of Man (1991), Pembrokeshire (2007), Dorset (Portland 1983 & 1990), Cornwall (1995, 1996) and the Isles of Scilly (1994 & 2015). There are an additional two records from Ireland: one at Garinish, Firkeel, Co. Cork on 27–28 September 1990 and one on Tory Island, Co. Donegal on 22 September 2001.

All records have been in autumn, with find dates between 15 September and 27 October, except for one at Goodwick Moor, near Fishguard (Pembrokeshire) on 19–23 November 2007 and just one in spring, at Calf of Man (Isle of Man) on 4–9 May 1991.

Plate 71. Tengmalm's Owl perched on an abandoned toilet within the lighthouse compound on Copinsay, Orkney, 2 November 2018. © *Owen Merriman*

Tengmalm's Owl, Copinsay, Orkney, 2 November 2018 – the sixth Orkney record

M. GRAY & A.J. LEITCH

Like many birders with a social media presence, Martin Gray sometimes gets messages from friends (both real and virtual) asking "What's this bird?" One such message arrived at teatime on 2 November 2018, it was from his old pal Barbara Merriman, surreally showing a Tengmalm's Owl perched on the edge of a derelict toilet.

It had been found and photographed that day by her son Owen when he was working in the lighthouse compound on the Orkney island of Copinsay. Once he'd picked his jaw up off the floor, MG involved two other trusted local birders (including Alan Leitch, the RSPB Reserves Manager for Orkney) with a view to deciding how to handle this news. It only took a few seconds to recognise that at that time, Copinsay would be packed with some 2,000+ pupping Grey Seals. The island has only one landing place; a very rickety and unsafe jetty in a sandy bay on the north-west coast. That bay, its grassy hinterland and the track up to the lighthouse are occupied by several hundred pupping grey seals. To sanction mass access, by any means, would have caused certain seal breeding colony disturbance amongst these highly sensitive mammals, at a time when they are at their most vulnerable. Also, Copinsay is a designated Grey Seal haul-out area and any intentional disturbance or harassment to the seals would have been a criminal offence.

Due to the location and time of year it was agreed that a very restricted release be put out using Owen's phone image to alert birdwatchers to the

fact that a Tengmalm's Owl had made it to our shores at an undisclosed location in Orkney.

Fully aware that this species has a huge cachet in British rarity circles, we were still taken aback by the substantial efforts by some to 'fish' for even the tiniest detail which might reveal the location. This unfortunately included a sly ruse on mainstream media in Orkney of a plea to reunite a non-existent Tengmalm's Owl claimed lost by a fictitious keeper on the adjacent Scottish mainland! Dismissed since as 'twitchers messing about', this was a clear attempt to subvert all local experience and concern, which at the time had both the bird and the site protected. Had it been successful, we believe that large numbers of people would probably have travelled to the island, with significantly negative consequences for the Grey Seal population. This level of deceit, and disrespect for the local decision-makers, is unacceptable and has been noted.

Plate 72 a–b. Copinsay lighthouse compound showing the location of abandoned toilet and outlook, 5 November 2018. © *M. Gray*

On 5 November, MG was invited to join a pre-arranged two-hour site inspection visit to the Copinsay Lighthouse with personnel from the Northern Lighthouse Board. The party of four, moving as circuitously as possible off the beach and up the island, still caused some unavoidable disturbance to the attendant female Grey Seals, some of which scattered to a safe distance as we passed, or indeed stayed to aggressively defend their pups.

It was not anticipated that the bird would still be present in such an atypical setting and this was quickly confirmed. There is no tree cover on Copinsay, and a very thorough check of the lighthouse complex and nearby farm buildings was performed, with negative results. A single pellet and three samples of possible 'splash' were collected in case they were from the owl, though this remains unconfirmed; with all other droppings there being from Rock Doves.

We remained concerned that even with the bird confirmed gone, visiting birders could potentially still travel to the island to 'see for themselves'. This would have had predictable and unacceptable consequences for the population of Grey Seals and their pups that lay between the islands one (condemned) landing place and the Lighthouse compound. After much thought and discussion, we resolved to not release the location until after the pupping season had ended.

Martin Gray, Voy Cottage, Sandwick, Stromness, Orkney KW16 3LW.

Alan J. Leitch, The Willows, Finstown, Orkney KW17 2EJ.
Email: Alan.Leitch@rspb.org.uk

Scottish Bird Sightings

1 October to 31 December 2018

S.L. RIVERS

Records in Scottish Bird Sightings are published for interest only. All records are subject to acceptance by the relevant records committee.

The following abbreviations for recording areas are used: Angus & Dundee - A&D; Argyll - Arg; Ayrshire - Ayrs; Borders - Bord; Caithness - Caith; Dumfries & Galloway D&G; Highland - High; Lothian - Loth; Moray & Nairn - M&N; North-East Scotland - NES; Outer Hebrides - OH; Perth & Kinross - P&K; Shetland - Shet; Upper Forth - UF.

The species order is that of the IOC World Birdlist as adopted by BOU on 1 January 2018.

Migration from the east remained much reduced in October, though a number of rarer birds did get through, notably on Shetland and Barra. Yellow-browed Warblers were scarcer than in 2017, but Great Grey Shrikes had their best showing for many years, and Waxwings were plentiful in the east in December.

Taiga Bean Goose: the regular Slammanan flock (Clyde/UF) was present throughout with peak counts of 214 on 27 October and 150 on 20 December. Elsewhere 15 flew over Ferryhill/North Queensferry (Fife) on 18 October; one was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 21 October; four at Nethy Bridge (High) on 22 December, and two at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 30 December. **Tundra Bean Goose:** one was on the Ythan Estuary (NES) on 2 October; two on Fair Isle on 7–19 November; five at Kilmichael, Lochgilphead (Arg) on 11 November; one at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 18–19 November; six at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 1–8 December; one on Fair Isle on 22–31 December, and two at Crimond (NES) on 29th. **(Lesser) Snow Goose:** a white morph bird was at Meikle Loch (NES) on 3 October; an intermediate morph at Findhorn (M&N) on 3–13 October; one at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 16–17 October; a blue morph at Loch of Skene (NES) from 23 October into 2019; an intermediate morph at Avoch/Munlochy Bay (High) on 31 October to 27 November, and an intermediate morph at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 24 December. **Canada Goose (vagrant forms)** ***interior*** - singles were at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay on 15–20 October; at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 17 October; at Loch of Clumly, Mainland (Ork) on 21 October; at Loch of Skene (NES) on 23 October; two at Munlochy Bay (High) on 5 November; one at Caoles, Tiree from 10 November into 2019; three at Allathasdal, Barra (OH) on 13–16 November, and one on Fair Isle on 16–23 December; ***parvipes*** - one was at Borve/Allathasdal, Barra (OH) from 9 October into 2019. **Cackling Goose (*hutchinsii*):** one was on Oronsay (Arg) on 18 October to 8 December; one at Gruinart, Islay (Arg) on 18 October, with a different bird there on 19 October. **Bewick's Swan:** one was at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 19 October and 30 December, and two at Loch of Clumlie, near Boddam, Mainland (Shet) on 17–18 December, and again from 31st. **Garganey:** one was at Scoughall (Loth) on 10–14 October. **Blue-winged Teal:** one was at Loch of Houll, Whalsay (Shet) on 17–28 October. **American Wigeon:** single drakes were still near Tain/Loch Eye (High) into 2019; at Oban Trumisgarry/Loch Aileodair, North Uist (OH) from 24 October into 2019, and at Loch Watten (Caith) on 1–11 December. **Black Duck:** the regular drake was still at Strontian (High) to 17 November. **Green-winged Teal:** single drakes were at Wick (Caith) from 12 October to 26 December; at Loch of Strathbeg RSPB Reserve (NES) on 19–23 October; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) from 20 October to 9 December; at Loch Sandary, North Uist (OH) from 29 October into 2019; at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) on 11–20 November; at Loch Mor, Benbecula (OH) on 18 November; at Loch Flemington (High/M&N) from 27 November into 2019; at Loch Gruinart RSPB Reserve, Islay (Arg) on 3–6 December (at least); at Loch a' Phuill, Tiree (Arg) on 23 December: at Tain Links (High) on 24 December, and at Culswick Marsh, Mainland (Shet) on 28 December. **Ferruginous Duck:** a drake was still at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) to 24 October. **Ring-necked Duck:** the drake was still at Gartmorn Dam (UF) to 3 October; a female was at Clumlie Loch, near Boddam, Mainland (Shet) from 12 October to 18 November; a female at Setter Marsh, Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) on 19 October; a first-year at Loch of Wester (Caith) on 20 October; a drake at Papil Water, Fetlar (Shet) on 25–29 October; a drake at Loch Watten (Caith) from 11 November

to 9 December, with two on 13th; a male, a female and immature male were at Loch Bhasapol/Loch a' Phuill, Tiree from 12 November into 2019; a drake on Coot Loch, Benbecula (OH) on 18 November, and Loch Fada/Coot Loch, Benbecula from 2 December into 2019; a female at St John's Loch (Caith) on 16 December into 2019, and a drake at Acharacle, Loch Shiel (High) on 18–28 December.

King Eider: the eclipse drake remained in Burghead Bay (M&N) to 6 October. **Surf Scoter:** two drakes were in the Sound of Taransay, Harris (OH) still, with three from 24 November, and joined by a female on 8 December, with two drakes and the female still on 28 December; single drakes off Musselburgh/Joppa (Loth) from 7 October into 2019; off Scurdie Ness (A&D) on 8 October; one in Gosford Bay (Loth) on 14th; one off West Sands, St Andrews (Fife) on 20th, with two there from 29 October into 2019; one flew past Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 27 October; a female/immature was at Beachmount, Loch Ryan (D&G) on 22–24 November and 5 December, with a drake at Glenside, Loch Ryan on 24 November, and off Cairnryan, Loch Ryan on 4 December; one off Berneray, North Uist (OH) on 24 November; a drake off Gullane Point (Loth) on 27 November, and a drake flew past Embo (High) on 8 December. **'American White-winged Scoter':** the returning drake was reported off Musselburgh Lagoons (Loth) to 9 November. **Smew:** a redhead remained at Loch Eye, near Tain (High) to 8 October; single redheads were at Lochore Meadows CP (Fife) from 5 November into 2019; at Barr Loch, Lochwinnoch (Clyde) from 5 November; at Logie Buchan (NES) on 14th; at Loch of Skene (NES) and at Loch Gelly (Fife) on 23 November; at Loch Watten (Caith) from 24 November to 11 December; at Cameron Reservoir (Fife) on 25 November, with two from 26th into 2019; one was at Kilconquhar Loch (Fife) on 4 December; a drake was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 6–8 December, and single redheads were at Loch Scarmclate (Caith) and at Loch Calder (Caith) on 9 December.

White-billed Diver: one flew south past Fife Ness (Fife) on 26 October, and one north on 27th; two flew north past Cransdale Head, Collieston (NES) on 27 October; with singles north past Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 28 October; south past Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 31 October; off Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 2 November; off Kirkabister, Mainland (Shet) on 2nd and 26 November; off Ardmhor ferry terminal, Barra (OH) on 24 November and off Eoligarry jetty on 1–20 December; one at Brig o' Waithe, Loch Stenness, Mainland (Ork) on 19 December; and about seven were off Papa Westray (Ork) on 21–23 December. **Pied-billed Grebe:** one was still at Loch Feorlin, near Lochgilphead (Arg) on 5 November, and the presumed returning bird was still at Loch of Spiggie, Mainland (Shet) from 4 October into 2019.

Spoonbill: two were at Forvie Sands (NES) on 10 October; two flew over Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 14 October [13:44 hrs], with likely the same pair at Aberlady/Kilspindie (Loth) later the same day [16:42 hrs]. **Bittern:** one was again at Loch of Kinnordy RSPB Reserve (A&D) from 30 October to 27 November. **Cattle Egret:** one was at Calgary, Mull (Arg) from 12 October to at least 13 November; one at Daliburgh/ Stoneybridge/ Ormiclate, South Uist (OH) on 20–28 October, and one was at North Porton Farm, near Bishopton (Clyde) on 12–17 November. **Great White Egret:** singles were at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 16 October; at Skinflats Lagoons RSPB Reserve (UF) on 19 October; at Caerlaverock WWT Reserve (D&G) from 20 October to 24 November and 26–27 December; at Duns (Bord) on 31 October to 7 November, and 18 November to 10 December; at Udale Bay RSPB Reserve (High) on 3 November; at Loch Ederline, (Arg) on 5 November; at Melvich Bay (Caith) on 8th; at Vendace Bay, Castle Loch (D&G) on 9th; at Creetown (D&G) on 12th; at Coldstream (Bord) from 12 November into 2019; singles at Laphroaig and then The Oa, Islay (Arg) on 21 November; at Aros Farm, Campbeltown (Arg) on 23 November, and at Carloway Loch, Lewis (OH) on 28 November. **Little Egret:** generally under-reported, but away from the Solway stronghold there were six still at Guardbridge (Fife) on 25 October; at least two toured Shetland in October, and singles were at Askernish, South Uist (OH) on 8 October; on Barra (OH) in mid-October; near Stornoway, Lewis (OH) on 15 October, and at Baleshare, North Uist (OH) on 30 November.

Honey-buzzard: one flew west over Aigas, near Beauly (High) on 7 October. **Rough-legged Buzzard:** one was at Loch Calder (Caith) on 14–15 October; one at Soberlie, Foula (Shet) on 30 October to 6 November; one was at Lochindorb (High) on 6 November; one was at Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 6 November; a juvenile was at Faseny Bridge, Lammermuir Hills (Loth) on 8th, with an adult female there on 9–10th and both present on 11th, with one or other there or nearby at Whiteadder Reservoir (Loth) to 14th, both together at Faseny Bridge on 15th, and one still to 2 December; singles at Garvald (Bord) on 11 November; at Invernaver, near Bettyhill (High) on 22 November, and at Langass Wood, North Uist (OH) on 24 November. **Spotted Crake:** one was at Burravoe, Mainland (Shet) on 3 October. **Crane:** one flew north over Oronsay/Colonsay (Arg) on 31 October, and one was at

Plate 73. Rough-legged Buzzard, Aberlady Bay, Lothian, November 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

Lees Haugh/Coldstream (Bord) from 14 November into 2019.

Avocet: one was inland near the Lecht (NES) on 21 November. **American Golden Plover:** an adult remained at Uyeasound, Unst (Shet) to 17 October; an adult was still on Sanday (Ork) on 11 October; an adult was on Bressay (Shet) on 2–7 October; a juvenile was at Askernish, South Uist (OH) on 3–12 October; a juvenile was at Torlum/Liniclate, Benbecula (OH) on 21–27 October and 5 November; two at West Gerinish, South Uist (OH) on 27 October, and one at Copister, Yell (Shet) on 11 November. **Baird's Sandpiper:** one remained at Findhorn Bay (M&N) to 11 October. **White-rumped Sandpiper:** one was at Pool of Virkie/Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 14 October. **Buff-breasted Sandpiper:** one was still at Hametoun, Foula (Shet) on 1–2 October, and one was at Mangersta, Lewis (OH) on 21 October. **Pectoral Sandpiper:** two were at West Gerinish/The Range, South Uist (OH) on 2 October, one there on 6 October and two again on 8th and 13th; one at Meikle Loch (NES) on 4–5 October; one at Askernish, South Uist on 5–6 October; one was at Mangersta, Lewis (OH) on 21st, and one at Loch Paible, North Uist (OH) on 22 October. **Grey Phalarope:** singles flew north past St Andrews Bay (Fife) on 8 October; past Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 16 October; south past Ardvule, South Uist (OH) on 19 October; three were off Castlehill, Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 23 October, with one there on 29th; singles were in Gott Bay, Tiree on 29 October; at Sandside Bay, Reay (Caith) on 4 November; at Cullen Bay (M&N) on 24 November; one flew past Corsewall Point (D&G) on 30 November, and one was at Stoneybridge, South Uist on 16 December. **Spotted Sandpiper:** a juvenile was at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 20–21 October. **Lesser Yellowlegs:** one was still at Askernish, South Uist (OH) to 6 October; one was at Aird an Runair, North Uist (OH) on 8 October; one at Loch Sandary/Loch Paible, North Uist on 11–14 October; a juvenile was at Cralling (Bord) on 21–23 October, and a juvenile at Broadford Bay, Skye (High) from 24 October to 17 November.

Ivory Gull: a juvenile was near Cairnbulg, near Fraserburgh (NES) on 12 December. **Sabine's Gull:** a juvenile flew north past the Isle of May on 5 October; an adult was off Musselburgh (Loth) on 15 October; a juvenile flew past Barns Ness and then Dunbar (both Loth) on 26 October, and one flew past Fife Ness (Fife) on 29 October. **Bonaparte's Gull:** an adult was at Lochgilphead (Arg) on 20 October. **Mediterranean Gull:** very few reported away from the Firth of Forth, but a first-winter was at Holm, near Stornoway (OH) on 12 October. **Ring-billed Gull:** a second-winter was at Sandaig, Tiree (Arg) from 11 November, and an adult was at Strathclyde CP, Motherwell (Clyde) on 24–25 December. **Glaucous Gull:** low numbers - about 40 in October; about 35 in November, and 20 in December. Mostly singles in the north and north-west, but noted south to Skateraw (Loth) and Islay (Arg), with higher counts of 12 past Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 27 October; three on Fair Isle on 16 December and several twos on the Northern and Western Isles. **Iceland Gull:** very low numbers -

just eight reports in October, 16 in November, and about 34 in December. Mostly singles in the north and west, noted south to Collieston (NES) and Troon (Ayrs), with higher counts of two at Ardmair, near Ullapool (High) on 16 December, two at Roughrigg Reservoir, near Airdrie (Clyde) on 26 December, and two near Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) and three on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 31 December. **'Kumlien's Gull':** a juvenile was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 4 November, with a third-winter there on 9 November; a juvenile was off West Hynish, Tiree (Arg) on 11 December, and a second-winter was at Girdle Ness (NES) on 16 December. **Black Tern:** the juvenile was still at Hogganfield Loch (Clyde) to 10 October, and one still at Barry Buddon, Carnoustie (A&D) to 6 October. **Pomarine Skua:** a good autumn passage, with at least 260 seen in October, mostly on the east coast and with nearly 150 reported on 26th alone, including high counts that day of 60 past Hound Point (Loth), 22 past Musselburgh (Loth), 18 past Chanonry Point (High), and 16 at Broadford Bay, Skye (High), and 15 past Castlehill, Dunnet Bay (Caith) on 23rd. Only 14 reported in November, mostly off the east again and all singles except for two past Tarbat Ness (High) on 10th. **Long-tailed Skua:** very low numbers seen with just seven noted in October, all singles, from Port Vasgo, near Tongue (High) to Kinghorn (Fife). There was also a juvenile off Rosehearty (NES) on 16 November.

Turtle Dove: singles were still on Foula (Shet) to 3 October; at Carinish, South Uist (OH) on 3 October; at Macduff (NES) on 4th, and at Ross of Mull, Mull (Arg) on 22 October. **Snowy Owl:** the female was still on St Kilda (OH) to 3 December; a male was on Eday (Ork) from 3 October into 2019; an immature male was at Stackaberg, Fetlar (Shet) on 8 October to 4 November, and one was at Beorgs of Uyea, Mainland (Shet) on 4 November. **Tengmalm's Owl:** one was on Copinsay (Ork) on 2 November. **Pallid Swift:** a notable influx into Britain brought reports of singles from Aberlady (Loth) on 7 November; Cummingstown (M&N) on 8 November; Donmouth, Aberdeen (NES) on 10 November, and Ronas Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 12 November. **Bee-eater:** one was at Crawford, near Abington (Clyde) on 12–15 October. **Hoopoe:** singles were at Lower Kilchattan, Colonsay (Arg) on 11 October (first for the island); at Montrose Basin (A&D) on 12–16 November, and at Boat of Garten (High) on 26–27 November.

Red-backed Shrike: a first-year was still at Heylipol, Tiree (Arg) to 10 October; a first-year near Garth, Mainland (Shet) still to 3 October, and a male at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 15 October. **Daurian (Isabelline) Shrike:** a first-year bird was at Eoligarry, Barra on 2–10 October - the second 'Isabelline Shrike' for the Outer Hebrides. **Woodchat Shrike:** one was at Sumburgh Head, Mainland (Shet) on 11 October, and Pool of Virkie, Mainland (Shet) on 17 October. **Great Grey Shrike:** all singles, with up to 12 on Shetland in October, while elsewhere birds were at Skateraw (Loth) on 11 October; at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 11th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12–25th; at Glen Tanar, near Aboyne (NES) on 18th; at Skaw, Whalsay on 19–22nd, and near Lochindorb (High) on 20–21st. In November, there were singles at Montreathmont Forest (A&D) on 10–15th; at Grantown-on-Spey (High) on 11th; near Lochindorb (High) on 15th and near Torness (Loth) on 15th. Singles were at Glen Feshie (High) on 1 December; at Finstown (Ork) also on 1st; at Old Kinord/Muir of Dinnet (NES) in early December; at Castlehill (Caith) on 5th, at Newburgh (Fife) on 6th, and at Voehead, Bressay (Shet) on 16th.

Waxwing: a good influx in autumn starting from 17 October, with over 560 noted by the end of the month from Shetland to Lothian and Dumfries & Galloway, with higher counts of 55 at Stornoway, Lewis (OH) and 22 at Nairn (M&N) on 30th, and 30 at Elgin (M&N) and c50 at Rhenetra, Skye (High) on 31st. In November, over 570 reported, from Shetland to Borders and Ayrshire, with higher counts of 250+ at Fochabers (M&N) on 22nd, 200 at Elgin on 13–16th, 180 at Kemnay (NES) on 25th, 150 at Bridge of Don, Aberdeen on 23rd, and 150 in Kirkcaldy (Fife) on 30th. In December there were well over 2,500 birds, with higher counts of 409 in Perth (P&K) on 18th, 250 at Bankhead, Edinburgh (Loth) on 20th, 200 at Fountainbridge, Edinburgh on 21st, 180 at Balgreen, Edinburgh on 14th, 170 in Kirkcaldy on 1st, and 140 in Dundee (A&D) on 18th. **Woodlark:** one flew north over Ferryhill (Fife) on 10 November. **Shore Lark:** singles were at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 14–28 October; on Fair Isle on 17 October; at Collieston (NES) on 4 November; at Aberlady LNR (Loth) on 5–10 November, with two there or nearby at Kilspindie from 12 November into 2019; one near Dungavel (Clyde) on 7 November; one at Everland, Fetlar (Shet) on 19 November; two at John Muir CP (Loth) from 1 December into 2019, and one at Buddon Ness (A&D) on 2–31 December. **Short-toed Lark:** one was near Fladdabister, Mainland (Shet) on 1–2 October, and one at Loch of Hillwell, Mainland (Shet) on 13th.

Dusky Warbler: one was at Garth, Mainland (Shet) on 8 November. **Pallas's Warbler:** singles were at Grutness, Mainland (Shet) on 12–14 October; at Vementry, near Aithsting, Mainland (Shet) on 13–14 October, and St Cyrus (NES) on 30 October. **Yellow-browed Warbler:** much reduced totals compared to recent years - in

Plate 74. Rose-coloured Starling, Barns Ness, Lothian, October 2018. © *Ian Andrews*

October up to 100 were on Shetland, five on Fair Isle, at least 15 on Orkney; over 30 in the Outer Hebrides, six in Caithness, 14 in Highland, one in Moray & Nairn, 22 in NE Scotland, seven in Angus, at least seven in Fife, five on the Isle of May, about 14 in Lothian, up to 16 in Borders, and three in Argyll. Birds were recorded south to Borders and Argyll, mostly in ones and twos, but with higher site counts of five at Crawton (NES) and on the Isle of May on 11th, at Muchalls (NES) on 13th, at Girdle Ness, Aberdeen (NES) on 14th, and on Fair Isle on 15th, and seven at St Abb's Head (Bord) on 13–14th. A notable broad-front arrival from Shetland to Borders occurred on 11 October. In November, there were singles at Hestily, South Ronaldsay (Ork) on 1st; at Voe, Mainland (Shet) on 2nd; at Kinneff, (NES) on 10th, and on Papa Westray (Ork) on 14th. **Hume's Warbler**: one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 16–19 November. **Blyth's Reed Warbler:** two were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 3 October; one at Lerwick, Mainland (Shet) on 3 October; one at Hoswick, Mainland (Shet) on 3rd; one at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 3–8th; one at Creachan, Barra (OH) on 4–5th, and one at Bakkasetter, Mainland (Shet) on 18 October. **Marsh Warbler:** one was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 1–6 October. **Booted Warbler:** one was at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 12–15 October. **Melodious Warbler:** one was still at Lunna, Mainland (Shet) to 8 October. **River Warbler:** one was at Baltasound, Unst (Shet) on 1–2 October, and one at Wester Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 14 October. **Lanceolated Warbler:** one was at Quendale, Mainland (Shet) on 4–5 October. **Barred Warbler:** in October there were up to 30 individuals on Shetland and up to 10 on Orkney, elsewhere there were two on Barra (OH) on 1st, with one still at Breibhig, Barra to 10th, and another nearby at Creachan on 10th; one at Bragar, Lewis (OH) on 6th, and one at Crawton (NES) on 13th. In November, there was one on Fair Isle on 5th and one at Skaw, Unst (Shet) on 11th. **Eastern Subalpine Warbler:** a female was at Isbister, Whalsay (Shet) on 6 October. **Firecrest:** singles were at Kinneff (NES) on 14 October; at Uig, Skye (High) on 15th, and at Laide (High) on 2 November.

Rose-coloured Starling: a juvenile remained at Barns Ness (Loth) to 10 October; a juvenile was at South Dell, Lewis (OH) on 19th; a juvenile at Annan (D&G) on 10–26 November, and at Montrose (A&D) on 19–20 November. **White's Thrush:** one was on Fair Isle on 13 October. **Swainson's Thrush:** one was at North Aywick, Yell (Shet) on 9–14 October. **Dusky Thrush:** a first-winter was at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 5 December. **Bluethroat:** singles were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12–14th and 28 October; at Skaw, Whalsay (Shet) on 13–14 October; at Burrafirth, Unst (Shet) on 15th; at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 16th, and on Fair Isle on 28 October. **Siberian Rubythroat:** a male was on Fair Isle on 28 October. **Red-breasted Flycatcher:** singles were at Cruden Bay (NES) on 3 October; near Exnaboe, Mainland (Shet) on 9th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 12th; at Grunitaing, Whalsay (Shet) and Muchalls (NES) on 14th; at Mains of Usan (A&D) on 14–17th; on Fair Isle on 18th; at Fife Ness (Fife) from 30 October to 1 November, and at Norwick, Unst (Shet) on 31 October. **Siberian Stonechat:** one was at Scalloway, Mainland (Shet) on 24–28 October. **Desert Wheatear:** one was at Port Arthur, Scalloway, Mainland (Shet) on 18 November. **Black-eared Wheatear:** one was on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11 October - first island record. **Pied Wheatear:** one was at Ham, Foula (Shet) from 29 October to 8 November.

Yellow Wagtail: one was on Fair Isle on 31 October. **Eastern Yellow Wagtail:** singles were at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 3 October, and at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) from 8 November to 3 December. **Citrine Wagtail:** singles were at Gardie, Bressay (Shet) from 2–13 October; at Saxa Vord, Unst (Shet) on 3 October, and at Skaw, Unst on 3–4 October. **Richard's Pipit:** singles were at

Montrose Links (A&D) on 6 October; on Fair Isle on 10 October; at St John's Loch (Caith) on 12th; on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 13–14th; at Lunan Bay (A&D) on 15th; at Torness Point (Loth) on 20th; at Easter Quarff, Mainland (Shet) on 27th; at Balnakeil (High) on 30 October; at Yellowcraig (Loth) on 12 November, and over Haddington (Loth) on 14 December. **Olive-backed Pipit:** two were on the Isle of May on 11 October, with one still to 13th, and one on 17th; singles were at South Collafirth, Mainland (Shet) on 13th; on Fair Isle on 13th and 17th, and at North Aywick, Yell (Shet) on 13–14th. **Pechora Pipit:** one was at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 3–6 October, and one at Castlebay, Barra on 13–15th - the second for the Outer Hebrides. **Water Pipit:** singles were at Barns Ness (Loth) on 25 October; at Collieston (NES) on 4 November; at Troon (Ayrs) from 4 November into 2019; at Ferny Ness/Longniddry (Loth) from 5 November to 14 December; at Pittenweem (Fife) on 10 November; at least three at Skateraw (Loth) on 25 November; at Largo Bay (Fife) from 1 December, with two on 10–19th, and one still into 2019; at Heads of Ayr (Ayrs) from 2–9 December; at Barns Ness on 3–26th; at Lendalfoot (Ayrs) on 16th; two at Scoughall (Loth) on 22nd, with one still to 28th; one at Kilspindie/Aberlady Bay (Loth) on 25th; one at Skateraw on 28–31st, with two there on 30th, and one on Papa Westray (Ork) on 29 December into 2019. **Buff-bellied Pipit:** one was on Foula (Shet) on 1 October.

Hawfinch: in October up to 20 were noted on Shetland, and five on Orkney, while elsewhere singles were noted on the Isle of May on 11th; on Fair Isle on 12th; at Melvich (High) on 13th; five over Ferryhill (Fife) on 13th, with three over there on 14th, and one on 18th and 28th; singles were at Munlochy (High) on 16th; at Arisaig (High) about the same time, and at Coldstream (Bord) on 21 October. In November there was one at St Andrews (Fife) on 1st; two at Drumoak (NES) on 4th; one at Grantown-on-Spey (High) on 5th, with three there on 10–12th and two still on 15th; then singles at Bigton, Mainland (Shet) on 18th; at Conon Bridge (High) on 27th; at Paiblesgarry, North Uist (OH) on 28 November; four at Scone Palace (P&K) on 1 December, and three still at Grantown-On-Spey on 23 December. **'Northern Bullfinch':** two were at St Andrews (Fife) on 22 October; a female on Fair Isle from 28 October to 16 November; one on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 30 October; a male at Lerwick (Shet) on 9 November; one at Whiteadder Reservoir (Loth) on 17 December, and two males at Eyemouth (Bord) on 19 December. **Common Rosefinch:** decent numbers in October, with about 11 on Shetland; one still on Fair Isle to 3rd; up to eight on Orkney; four on the Outer Hebrides, and one at Balephuil, Tiree (Arg) on 3–4 October. In November there were singles at Port Nis, Lewis (OH) and on Grimsay (OH) on 5th; at Northdale, Unst (Shet) and on Foula (Shet) on 8th, and at Baltasound, Unst on 16th and 21st. **Arctic Redpoll:** birds identified as the *hornemanni* subspecies were on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28–29 October, and at Skaw/Lamba Ness, Unst (Shet) on 29–31 October; birds of the *exilipes* subspecies were at Norwick, Unst on 29 October, at Walls, Mainland (Shet) and on Fair Isle on 30 October; on North Ronaldsay on 30 October and 5 November; at The Bell, near Whiteadder Reservoir (Loth) from 21 December into 2019, and at Baltasound, Unst on 26 December. **Baltimore Oriole:** a first-year male was at Morghan, Barra (OH) on 17–21 October - second for the Outer Hebrides.

Little Bunting: one was at Haroldswick, Unst (Shet) on 6 October; two on North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 11 October; and singles at Loch of Hillwell. Mainland (Shet) on 11th; at Sumburgh, Mainland (Shet) on 11–13th, and at Toab, Mainland (Shet) and Balcomie, Fife Ness (Fife) on 14 October. **White-crowned Sparrow:** the first-winter was still on Foula (Shet) to 14 October. **White-throated Sparrow:** one remained at Harrier, Foula (Shet) to 10 October. **Lapland Bunting:** low numbers reported: with up to seven on Shetland in October, up to six on Fair Isle, and five on Orkney including three on North Ronaldsay on 3rd. Elsewhere there were two at Butt of Lewis (OH) on 1 October; two at Bragar, Lewis on 3rd; one at Kilmory, Rhum (Arg) on 8th; three near Guardbridge (Fife) on 10th; one at Gallan Head, Lewis on 21st; and one at Loch Stiapabhat, Lewis on 28 October. In November there was one on North Ronaldsay on 1–2nd, and one at Kingsbarns (Fife) on 15th. **Snow Bunting:** a very good showing, mostly in the Northern and Western Isles, but with records south to Borders and Argyll. Over 570 reported in October with high counts of 80 on Out Skerries (Shet) on 27th, 105 on Fair Isle and 128 North Ronaldsay (Ork) on 28th and 20 at Port Nis, Lewis (OH) on 3rd. Well over 800 in November with highest counts of 139 on Fair Isle on 6th, 94 on North Ronaldsay 20th, and 85 on Berneray (OH) on 24th. Over 700 noted in December, with higher counts of 102 on North Ronaldsay on 10th, 50 at Loch of Skaill, Mainland (Ork) on 5th, 100 at Borve, Berneray (OH) on 16th, and 30 at Nairn (M&N) on 9th.

SOC Branch Secretaries

Ayrshire: Anne Dick
Rowanmyle House, Tarbolton, Mauchline KA5 5LU.
Tel: 01292 541981
Email: a_m_dick@btinternet.com

Borders: Neil Stratton
Heiton Mains, Main Street, Heiton, Kelso TD5 8JR.
Tel: 01573 450695.
Email: neildstratton@btinternet.com

Caithness: Angus McBay
Schoolhouse, Weydale, Thurso KW14 8YJ.
Tel: 01847 894663
Email: angmcb@btinternet.com

Central: Neil Bielby
56 Ochiltree, Dunblane FK15 0DF.
Tel: 01786 823830
Email: neil.bielby@gmail.com

Clyde: Ian Fulton
8 Barrachnie Avenue, Baillieston, Glasgow G69 6SR.
Tel: 0141 773 4329
Email: clydesecretary@the-soc.org.uk

Dumfries: Lesley Creamer
Braeside, Virginhall, Thornhill DG3 4AD.
Tel: 01848 330821
Email: dumfriessecretary@the-soc.org.uk

Fife: Caroline Gordon
25 Mackie Crescent, Markinch, Glenrothes KY7 6BB.
Tel: 01592 750230
Email: fifesecretary@the-soc.org.uk

Highland: Kathy Bonniface
Alt Dubh, North End, Tomatin, IV13 7YP.
Tel: 01808 511740
Email: highlandsecretary@the-soc.org.uk

Lothian: Morag King
7 Durham Terrace, Edinburgh EH15 1QJ.
Tel: 0131 258 4638
Email: abercorncottage@gmail.com

Moray: Alison Ritchie
45 Highfield, Forres IV36 1FN.
Tel: 01309 674379
Email: moraysecretary@the-soc.org.uk

North-East Scotland: John Wills
Bilbo, Monymusk, Inverurie AB51 7HA.
Tel: 01467 651 296
Email: grampian.secretary@the-soc.org.uk

Orkney: Helen Aiton
Cuppar, Evie, Orkney KW17 2PJ.
Tel: 01856 751482
Email: helendavidaiton@hotmail.co.uk

Stewartry: Joan Howie
The Wilderness, High Street, New Galloway,
Castle Douglas DG7 3RL.
Tel: 01644 420 280
Email: joanospreys1@btinternet.com

Tayside: Brian Brocklehurst
146 Balgillo Road, Broughty Ferry, Dundee DD5 3EB.
Tel: 01382 778 348
Email: brian.brocklehurst1@btinternet.com

West Galloway: Geoff Sheppard
The Roddens, Leswalt, Stranraer DG9 0QR.
Tel: 01776 870 685
Email: geoff.roddens@btinternet.com

SOC Local Recorders

Angus & Dundee: Jon Cook
01382 738495
1301midget@tiscali.co.uk

Argyll: Jim Dickson 01546 603967
Argyllbirder@outlook.com
Assistant recorder: Malcolm Chattwood
abcrecorder@outlook.com

Ayrshire: Fraser Simpson
recorder@ayrshire-birding.org.uk
Assistant recorder: Angus Hogg
dcgos@globalnet.co.uk

Borders: David Parkinson
01896 822028 and
Martin Moncrieff 01835 822398
bordersrecorder@gmail.com

Caithness: Sinclair Manson
01847 892379
sinclairmanson@btinternet.com

Clyde: Iain Gibson 01505 705874
iaingibson.soc@btinternet.com
Assistant recorder: Val Wilson
val.wilson38@btinternet.com

Clyde Islands: Bernard Zonfrillo
0141 557 0791
b.zonfrillo@bio.gla.ac.uk

Dumfries & Galloway:
Paul N. Collin
01671 402861
pncollin@live.co.uk

Fair Isle: David Parnaby
01595 760258
fibo@btconnect.com

Fife: Graham Sparshott
07770 225440
grahamspa@aol.com

Forth (Upper): Chris Pendlebury
07798 711134
chris@upperforthbirds.co.uk
Assistant recorder: Neil Bielby
neil.bielby@gmail.com

Highland: Peter Stronach
07470 984937
highlandrecorder@gmail.com

Isle of May: Iain English
01698 891788
i.english@talk21.com

Lothian: Stephen Welch
01875 852802
lothianrecorder@the-soc.org.uk

Moray & Nairn: Martin Cook
01542 850296
martin.cook99@btinternet.com

NE Scotland: Ian Broadbent
07790 562892
nescotlandrecorder@the-soc.org.uk

Orkney: Russ Neave &
Emma Neave-Webb
01857 600272
orkbird.recorder@gmail.com

Outer Hebrides: Yvonne Benting
07501 332803
recorder@outerhebridesbirds.org.uk

Perth & Kinross: Scott Paterson
01577 864248
pkrecorder@the-soc.org.uk

Shetland: Rob Fray
01950 461929
recorder@shetlandbirdclub.co.uk

PhotoSPOT

Plate 75. During a day's birding around Loch Ryan, I came across a small group of Rooks and Jackdaws feeding on the grass beside the car park. The light was good so, rather than take yet more conventional portraits, I tried for something a bit different and went for some low-angle shots.

I spent several hours lying flat on the grass, doubtless to the bemusement of the dog walkers, and this is one of the resulting shots.

Equipement: Canon 1DX mk2, 300mm f2.8 mk2. Aperture Priority, ISO 500, 1/2700 sec, f2.8.

Iain Leach, Blackcraig, Newton Stewart.
Email: iainhleach@gmail.com

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